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THE

MISCELLANEOUS COMPANIONS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

BRITISH MUSEUM

THE MISCELLANEOUS COMPANIONS:

VOL. II.

CONTAINING

MAXIMS AND THOUGHTS;

WITH

REFLECTIONS

ON

SELECT PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE.

BY

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BRITISH MUSEUM

MISCELLANEOUS

MAXIMS AND THOUGHTS.

I.

IF a man would be happy reſpecting worldly friendſhips, he muſt neither court nor deſire them. He may be more rationally happy without them, and then his happineſs will ſtand on the moſt ſecure baſis.

II.

If a man, who has little money, would be reſpected for his knowledge, he muſt not venture to converſe much on common or trivial ſubjects: men will not make allowances to him as to a rich man.

III.

Univerſal and *equal* good-will keeps the mind ſocial towards the world: the man who attains it diſcharges much chriſtian duty—while he finds that *familiarity* is not eſſential to the happineſs of others or himſelf.

IV.

If thou ſpend a whole day in needful labour, and get wearineſs, be not uneaſy; if, through ſuch a day, thou haſt been kept from *ſin*, it is a ſtep well taken towards the end of all wearineſs.

V.

Why ſo much ſolicitude to converſe, on familiar terms, with men of diſtinguiſhed abilities and fortune? Why ſo much ſervility for the attainment of ſuch a diſtinction, or ſo much uneaſineſs at diſappointment? There is a privilege ſtill more valuable, within the moſt common reach: we may converſe at pleaſure, and without ceremony, with the moſt illuſtrious men in *their works*; wherein alſo they have been careful to ſay thoſe things which they thought the moſt worthy of being ſaid, and in the beſt manner they could. Add to this, that ſuch

ſuch a kind of converſe, while it inſtructs us at our own pleaſure, is in no danger of alloy or interruption from the caſual variation and reſentment of the human mind.

VI.

If thou wouldſt be a wiſe man, deſire not to have any particular favourite, or confidant on the ground of *mere friendſhip*; ſuch an one, of thy own ſex, will wound thy ſoul deeply if he prove unfaithful; and if a woman, eſpecially a young woman, it is more than poſſible that you will be too much enamoured for your ſituation.

VII.

Seeing the vanity of particular attachments and recreations, forego them all—ſeek quietneſs in private induſtry, and in the hours of leiſure, for certain improvement without danger, prefer good reading to the caſualties of any common converſation.

VIII.

If thou art favoured to know that thou haſt many imperfections, not only deſire to over-

come them, but make ſuitable allowances for thoſe of others.

IX.

It may be wiſe in us to refrain from ſpeaking of any man's general or particular faults, unleſs the occaſion abſolutely call for it. Such faults will be ſeen, as faults, without our dwelling upon them; and it more concerns us to ſhew forth our diſlike by our own better conduct, which will ſpeak louder than words.

X.

If a man think himſelf called to preach to others, he ſhould conſider that call as the moſt awful which can be given, and regard it accordingly. Under ſuch a call, it is not ſtrange if many things are *forbidden* him, for his own and the church's good: he ſhould rather wonder how he can have too little of the commerce of this world.

XI.

Never call a man *rogue*, or bluntly charge him with diſhoneſty; few men can bear either: if thou believe a man to be diſhoneſt, coolly and clearly ſtate thy reaſons againſt him, and leave

leave him to draw the concluſion: thou wilt be in danger of hurting thyſelf by doing otherwiſe, and of making him worſe.

XII.

If thou raſhly ſay a thing which ought not to have been ſaid, confeſs thy fault as ſoon as thou can'ſt; it is the leaſt atonement thou can'ſt make. If thou raſhly engage to do a thing which ought not to be done, do not make bad worſe by perſiſting to do it for thy word's ſake.

XIII.

The cares of this life being neceſſarily many, is it not wiſe to make them as few as poſſible by contentment in a little buſineſs?

XIV.

Much buſineſs bringeth much worldly care; and what can compenſate for the loſs of time, that is voluntarily and unneceſſarily incumbered?

XV.

If we let the inward inſtructor ſpeak, and be obeyed in little things, we ſhall never want a guide in great ones.

XVI.

Guard againſt haſtily becoming a ſurety for thy ſuppoſed friend, and thou ſhalt have the fewer enemies, and the fewer troubles.

XVII.

Well did the wiſe man ſay, "Riches cer-"tainly make themſelves wings, and fly away "as an eagle towards heaven!" *Prov.* xxiii. 5. And the royal Pſalmiſt, "He gave them their "requeſt, but ſent leanneſs into their ſoul!" *Pſa.* cvi. 15.

XVIII.

All true riches centre in the mind; but the love of outward grandeur and pleaſure makes the poverty of the ſpirit!

XIX.

Sweet are thoſe thoughts into which neither the luſt of the eye, the luſt of the fleſh, nor the pride of life, enter!

XX.

Be not over-earneſt in the purſuit even of thoſe outward objects that may ſeem the moſt proper

proper for thee; for ſteadineſs and calmneſs of mind make a preſent good, which over-earneſtneſs of deſire may deſtroy.

XXI.

That good often wears beſt, and laſts longeſt, which is obtained by ſteady and patient application.

XXII.

Words are often eaſy, when proof is hard; and the tongue is found to be the ever faithful auxiliary of the determined and obſtinate mind.

XXIII.

Well did an ingenious writer ſay of ſolitude, that in it "the mind gains ſtrength, and learns "to lean upon herſelf: in the world it ſeeks "or accepts a few treacherous ſupports;—the "feigned compaſſion of one—the flattery of a "ſecond—the civilities of a third—the friendſhip of a fourth; they all deceive, and bring "the mind back to retirement, reflection, and "books!" But though they read ſo many excellent maxims of wiſdom, and their judgments are ſo fully convinced of the laſting advantages

vantages of true philoſophy; how frail, how forgetful, and how much under the influence of the paſſions, are men of ſuperior accompliſhments found! But they are living monitors to teach us wiſdom by their weakneſs!

XXIV.

Of all ſubjects that can poſſibly engage human attention, there is none which can ſtand in the leaſt degree of compariſon with the knowledge of GOD. To contemplate him as the creator and preſerver of all things, and the wiſe and gracious benefactor of innumerable myriads of ſentient and rational beings, is certainly an employment the moſt exalted in itſelf, and conſequently the moſt worthy of the higheſt of his creatures. It muſt indeed be acknowledged, that to conceive of the ſupreme Being, as he exiſts in his infinite perfections, is impoſſible; to riſe to a degree of comprehenſion adequate to any part or attribute of his glorious nature, is not to be expected. But if we attend to the evidences of his exiſtence all around us, we are ſtruck with inconteſtible proofs of his goodneſs as well as power: if to the language of holy writ, where his nature is

ſpoken

ſpoken of in the moſt ſtriking and emphatical manner, we find it pronounced to be *love*, and *light*, &c. GOD *is light, and in him there is no darkneſs at all.* GOD *is love.* Under theſe figures the ſerious mind has her abundant feaſt of contemplation.

XXV.

From the moſt attentive conſideration of the character of the Supreme Being, can it be poſſible for any ſerious man to think otherwiſe, than that it muſt be the perfection of a created nature to attain the higheſt poſſible reſemblance of the divine attributes? And ſeeing we are privileged to make ſome ſenſible, though almoſt infinitely diſtant advances, towards his glorious nature of *love*, and the fruit of ſuch ſenſible advances is *peace*, which nothing elſe can give a true taſte of, how unwiſe are the children of this world in their continual choice of inferior purſuits!

XXVI.

" The LORD hath his way in the whirlwind " and in the ſtorm, and the clouds are the " duſt of his feet. *Nah.* i. 3.

This

This prophet, though the book of his prophecy be ſhort, and relating to one ſubject, viz. The judgment of GOD againſt the city of Nineveh, ſeems to have been inſpired with a large effuſion of the divine ſpirit, and ſpeaks with an authority and ſolemnity, which, as it claimed the ſerious attention of the people of his time, ought likewiſe to command the ſerious conſideration of all people, at all times. And though many ages have paſſed away ſince the deſtruction of that city, and the particular deliverance of the Jews, there never can be an age in which the laws of fear and reverence are not awful in themſelves, and as they regard the infinite holineſs of the Almighty.

In *this* age, therefore, it behoves *us* to be deeply thoughtful of GOD, by whom we have been created, by whoſe power we live and move; and endeavour to have our *minds* raiſed into a ſuitable contemplation and reverence of him; that as we are paſſing away, like the ages that have gone before us, and we know not the meaſure of our days, we may live ſuitably to the frailty of our ſhort and uncertain life, and in all our ways be found the true worſhippers

pers of him that is invisible! He is indeed invisible to us, with respect to the nature of his being; but we are not without the most awful proofs and evidences of his adorable attributes!

The works of his creative and sustaining power are infinite, and none but the fool can say in his heart "There is no GOD." He is, beyond all controversy, in every place, and every visible thing testifies of his presence! Well might the royal Psalmist say, "The heavens de-"clare the glory of GOD, and the firmament "sheweth his handy works. Day unto day ut-"tereth speech, and night unto night sheweth "forth knowledge!" But though the great Creator of all things be every where, in every moment of time, there is an evidence of his tremendous presence, particularly solemn, in the movings and voices of the elements around us: In the winds of heaven, and the storms of the firmament: "The LORD hath his way in the "whirlwind, and in the storm, and the clouds "are the dust of his feet!"

In

XXVII.

In proportion as any church or body of men are removed in the terms of their aſſociation, and the principle of their union, from the obvious liberality of the doctrines, and the ſimple examples of JESUS CHRIST, they are removed from chriſtian ground, and from the genuine import of the name *chriſtian!*

XXVIII.

Few diſtinctions or deſcriptions of men, I ſuppoſe none, will be found to believe that they are ſo removed; or, that they are not *the* ſociety moſt in conformity to the doctrines and precepts of the goſpel, and conſequently moſt truly the church of CHRIST.

XXIX.

Every church being partial to itſelf, and fully perſuaded of its own ſuperior purity of faith, if not of its own excluſive orthodoxy; it is not to be wondered at, that every church ſhould have in it members weak enough, and zealous enough, to render it ridiculous to infidels and irreligious perſons, by giving it the titles of *the only*

only true church; and, *the church and people of* GOD! But the wiſe, to the utmoſt allowable degree, muſt learn to bear with the weak.

XXX.

A religious profeſſor ſhould be tender of hurting the feelings of any man in religious matters: he ſhould not only wiſh to guard againſt ſo doing with reſpect to thoſe in, but out of communion with himſelf. A liberal thinker and writer, however, will more frequently be in danger of offending his brother profeſſors, than thoſe of other communities; and that for the reaſon above expreſſed.

It therefore behoves a man who writes for the reformation of a partial or bigotted diſpoſition, ſo common to churches, to attempt (not by uſing dogmatical aſſertions, which are the common aids of ignorance, and a bad cauſe; but) by ſober enquiry and argument, to induce an examination into the grounds and truth of things.

XXXI.

Why would we wiſh for a long continuance in this world? Would we live for the ſake of *old age?*

What is that but to live for ſecond childhood, wearineſs, and pain;—to be burdenſome to our friends, and of little uſe to ſociety?

Would we live to get money for *ourſelves?*

What is that but to live a life of conſtant anxiety and ſervility, to procure it;—to wear out our powers of enjoyment in the attainment of our object; and to acquire a ſelfiſhneſs, which muſt counteract all eventual ſatisfaction? What is it but to procure the envy of the ignorant, the blame of the wiſe, the rivalſhip of the rich, and the trouble or the curſes of the poor?

Would we live to grow rich for the ſake of being *generous?*

This may be a popular and a benevolent argument. But what better privilege do we deſire

deſire by this, than the leſſening of the power of *others* to do that good, which it is altogether uncertain whether we ſhould do better than they?

Would we live for the ſake of ſeeing our *friends happy*, and our *neareſt relatives provided for?*

This likewiſe is a benevolent motive. But will our friends be leſs happy by being releaſed from the trouble of our infirmities? Or, will our relatives be leſs under the protection of divine providence in our abſence, than if, being preſent, we could watch them on our crutches? And moſt certainly we muſt be parted from them at laſt!

XXXII.

The reſult ſeems to be, that we ſhould endeavour to acquire more than a *reſignation*—a *readineſs*, and a *deſire*, to go out of this world juſt as ſoon as it ſhall pleaſe infinite wiſdom to order. A period to an uncertain life, is the fixed and immutable law of our Creator upon us—ever to be expected—ever to be waited for.

And

And while it ſeems to be no part of the good of a wiſe man to be anxious about the poſſeſſion of any outward thing, which he is not poſſeſſed of, and which may be more proper to the ſphere of another, it ſeems to be the chiefeſt duty "to do good, and communicate," of thoſe mental poſſeſſions, which a real chriſtian finds himſelf privileged to acquire; for ſuch poſſeſſions are moſt properly his own, and the nature of them the moſt reſembling the divine Being.

Of theſe a man may impart, without diminiſhing his own ſtock of happineſs: and from a free and loving communication of the beſt convictions and intellectual views of individuals, ſhall moſt probably reſult the greateſt ſocial good of the whole. The conſciouſneſs of ſo doing, is moſt likely to be attended with tranquility in time, and the moſt comfortable hopes with reſpect to eternity.

XXXIII.

We have but little better evidence of the importance of many things in *religion*, than the earneſtneſs of the diſpute in which people engage about them; and we know, reaſoning from

from moſt obvious data, how uncertain an evidence that is: for if we begin with *children*, the plants of zealous men, we may frequently obſerve how unequal to the importance of the object is the fury of the conteſt about the poſſeſſion of the ſmalleſt toy, or the puſhing of two pins!

In *more robuſt youth*—how much of the fire of the ſoul is thrown into a mere trial of bodily ſtrength, even at the riſque of bones and of life!

The ſame remark may be applied to ſome of the ridiculous amuſements of the field!

In *polite life*—how important (merely through the unneceſſary trouble of it) is made *the point of etiquette!*

In *dreſs*—how great a ſacrifice of the underſtanding to the prevalence of faſhion, which nobody attempts to know the ſtandard, or the intrinſic uſe of!

In *eating* and *drinking*—how much ſolicitude and expence, only to diſorder and ſicken the body, for a moment's gratification!

But ſuch is the perverſeneſs and unhappineſs of poor human nature!

XXXIV.

As one of our Engliſh writers found it in literature, ſo will it ever be found in morals and theology; "as no author is ſo poor but he "can keep a critick," ſo no religious character is ſo obſcure, but he will generally be able to maintain, not merely a critick, but a greater or leſſer *tribe* of criticks, upon his orthodoxy and his goodneſs; and a man muſt have far better fare than JESUS CHRIST and all the apoſtles, who can paſs through life without cenſure from this kind of cenſors!

But this reflection, as well as a multitude of others, may receive much alleviation of its pain, from conſiderations of the lapſed ſtate, or the weakneſs of the human mind: not to mention, but juſt paſſingly in this place, that through that weakneſs, which even *grace itſelf* doth not annihilate, *apoſtleſhip* was not always exempt from apoſtolical rebuke. See *Gal.* ii. 11.

It

XXXV.

It hath ever appeared to me, that moral and religious truths, ſo far as they concern the good order and happineſs of religious and civil ſociety, are in themſelves ſimple; and that much need not be ſaid on thoſe ſubjects, and nothing arrogantly, to anſwer all the good ends of communication and argument.

XXXVI.

From a cloſe and ſerious obſervation of men and things, which different circumſtances have promoted from an early period of life, I have been long convinced how few there are among the generality of religious profeſſors, in any ſociety, who arrive at a ſolid, rational, and truly chriſtian conviction about *principles*; and conſequently how few there are qualified to be judges of the unſoundneſs or orthodoxy of others.

From a continued obſervation of the effects of the work of grace, or ſuppoſed grace, as influencing men's conduct, in thoſe eſſentials of chriſtianity, laid down by the holy pattern JESUS CHRIST, I am alſo convinced that there are

indeed very few of thoſe who have adopted ſyſtems of religion, qualified to judge rightly of ſpiritual ſtates, and wherein the genuine advancement of real chriſtianity conſiſts!

And when I ſee people, however high in profeſſion, judging narrowly and by ſyſtem, about points of the firſt importance—principles in which *ſome* doubtings and danger of error are naturally involved, I can have but ſmall dependance on their wiſdom in matters more adapted to human deciſion.

Hence alſo, I am convinced how neceſſary it is for a man calmly to ſearch for himſelf, deliberately to judge as he can, and endeavour ſimply to act according to the cleareſt perſuaſion of his own mind.

XXXVII.

It ſeems to be the eſſential duty of every reaſonable being, in whatſoever religious ſociety born and educated, to have a religion of his own; a religion of his judgment, by which he can live happily, and ſo hope to die. Conſequently that he is bound to take nothing upon truſt;

truſt; but examine and be ſatisfied which are the points neceſſary for him to believe; and which be thoſe that he may conſider as non-eſſential to the regulation of his life and conduct.

For by *birth* we have no eſſential faith—by *education* and the doctrine of others, merely, we have no eſſential religion—as it is certain that by *grace* we have no power of preſcription, or right of domination.

XXXVIII.

The reſult of my conſideration, about the eſſentials of religious fellowſhip and aſſociation, is briefly this:—

I hold it true, that no religious ſociety of people, embodied or to be embodied, by rules peculiar to themſelves, after an eſſential agreement about the main fundamental point of union, viz. *The mode of worſhipping Almighty* GOD—that one great thing to be done—can righteouſly bring into their ſyſtem of eſſentials, any extraneous or doubtful matter whatever—can righteouſly require a poſitive agreement

about any temporal things which affect the common intereſts, and the harmony of civil ſociety—and about which the holy head of the Catholic church (which church is made up of the honeſt and ſimple-hearted of all deſcriptions of men under heaven) hath thought fit to be ſilent.

Otherwiſe the main end of all rightly religious aſſociation, viz. The promotion of peace, in and by the ſpirit of love (which is not of this world) would be ſo far defeated, and heart-burnings and ſtrife promoted.

XXXIX.

It was not the pleaſure of our BLESSED SAVIOUR to inſtance every circumſtance in which the *paſſive obedience* of his followers, to the powers of the earth, was to be exemplified, through ſucceeding ages; but on the principle of *his kingdom being not of this world*, he ſet his diſciples, on ſome particular occaſions, an example of that paſſive obedience, which (not touching the liberty of their minds to worſhip his heavenly Father in ſpirit and in truth, or in copying after himſelf in works of humility and love) was

was to be regarded, for their peaceable conduct, when he ſhould be removed from them—and perpetually afterwards in his church.

XL.

It is a notion among ſome pious profeſſors of chriſtianity, that *verbal eloquence, in religious diſcourſes, cannot come from the right ſpring of chriſtian miniſtry:*—A poſition which I think can only be true on the principle of good language being incompatible with a good ſubject:—for I am firmly of the belief, that a diſcourſe coming from the ſpring of goodneſs, is more likely than any other to be eloquent. And ſo far as it falls ſhort of genuine eloquence (which is *clear, perſpicuous,* and *animated)* it partakes, or is more likely to partake, of human imperfection.

In an inſpired language, deſigned for the good of mankind, will ſurely be found theſe requiſites—clearneſs, perſpicuity, and animation; and the want of them, in a religious diſcourſe, ſeems to me the greateſt proof of that diſcourſe not being inſpired.

If

If we advert to holy writ, we find the inſpired language of the prophets abounding with the moſt perfect examples of eloquence. No human compoſition is found to equal them in variety, beauty, and ſtrength of metaphor.

The ſacred language of our BLESSED SAVIOUR is not to be the ſubject of this kind of remark; but wherever we find the *apoſtles* publickly ſpeaking to the people on the ſublime ſubject of the chriſtian religion, we uniformly perceive that their inſpired "teſtimonies from "the right ſpring," are ſo many examples of real eloquence—in which point of view, it is certain that the ſpeeches of Paul before Felix and Agrippa, are ſo excellent in their kind, that they have been adduced as examples of the moſt perfect rhetorick.

XLI.

It is ſurely on the ſublime doctrines of undefiled religion, if on any ſubject under heaven, that the prophecy may be expected to be fulfilled:—"The tongue of the ſtammerer ſhall "learn to ſpeak plainly."

So

XLII.

So inconſiderable and abſurd have ſome proteſtant church diſciplinarians been, as to broach the doctrine of blind obedience to mother church, when other arguments have failed of producing uniformity in exterior matters. And to induce a compliance without conviction, I have heard it ſaid, with the boldeſt aſſurance, that as a reward to individuals for implicit aſſent to the ſuperior light and authority of the church, conviction would doubtleſs be ſent *afterwards* from heaven! A doctrine which might have done for the church of Rome, in the zenith of her authority; but is ever, ſurely, to be rejected with ſome degree of contempt, in a rational proteſtant community!

XLIII.

No ſtage of human exiſtence is exempt from erroneous judgment; this ſhould operate as a reaſon why ſuch poor frail beings as men ſhould not attempt to bear each other down under the pretence of infallibility, or any thing that ſavours of preſumption.

The

XLIV.

The goodneſs of the heart, and the clearneſs of the head, are ever different things. When they meet in the ſame perſon, they render the poſſeſſor truly amiable; when the former is alone conſpicuous, we love it; but a good underſtanding alone is neither the object of affection, of confidence, or eſteem.

XLV.

Reſpecting the neceſſity of publick worſhip, as that kind of practical allegiance to Almighty GOD, which is neceſſary to preſerve our ſenſe of dependance upon him, and the rectitude of his laws, and the goodneſs of his providence, all ſerious men are agreed: reſpecting the *mode* of that worſhip, no argument is required to prove that there hath almoſt always been a difference of ſentiment; and reſpecting the order of diſcipline, which has been conſidered as an appendage of worſhip, the chriſtian world hath been ever diſagreeing, ſince the embodying of churches. The confuſion began even in the times of ſuppoſed apoſtolical purity, and hath ever ſince continued, a ſource of unhappineſs

—furniſhing

—furniſhing ſpots in the chriſtian feaſt of charity!

XLVI.

No right, however built on example, can ſuperſede, in matters of faith, the inalienable right of private judgment; and where that right ſubſiſts in nature, no reſtraining power over individuals can exiſt in any church, ſo as to prevent their offering, even publickly, reaſons of diſſatisfaction; becauſe on ſuch reaſons muſt be founded every improvement that can poſſibly take place.

A church, or diſtinctly aſſociated body, is a publick object; and juſtly an object of publick inſpection and animadverſion: if ſhe be neceſſary at all, ſhe is mainly neceſſary as a light in the world, and whereinſoever ſhe has any deformity of parts, it ſhould be pointed out, not only that blindneſs in part may not, as it did to Iſrael formerly, happen to herſelf, but that her comparative excellencies or defects may be fully and fairly known.

Arguments

XLVII.

Arguments drawn from the ſufferings of firſt reformers, and eſtabliſhers of church diſtinctions, in favour of the rectitude of the principles ſo eſtabliſhed, is ever a tender theme, and ever prevalent with a conſiderable part of the religious world; but it is far from appearing clear, that ſuch ſufferings which have often been the natural conſequence of ſingular, or of new opinions, in times of national diſtraction and darkneſs, are in themſelves a ſufficient warrant for us to conſider thoſe opinions as of divine original; or the conduct of ſuch reformers as uniformly wiſe, and worthy to be followed.

Many ſuch ſuffering men have ſet us noble examples of faithfulneſs under afflictions, which befel them in the cauſe of truth; to ſome of theſe we owe much veneration for that wiſdom and firmneſs, with which they oppoſed religious impoſition and tyranny. So far they have uniformly given proofs of ſincerity; but in conſidering this, it is alſo to be remembered, that ſincerity hath often appeared on *both ſides* of the *ſame* cauſe; ſincerity hath been the companion

of

of martyrdom, among men of various and even oppoſite principles. And though martyrdom may juſtly be conſidered as the laſt teſt of a man's ſincerity, it can be no uniform teſt of TRUTH.

From theſe, as well as various other conſiderations in religion, appears the neceſſity of our ſoberly, earneſtly, patiently, and meekly enquiring for ourſelves, what we are to believe? and what our LORD would have us to do?

XLVIII.

Well indeed was it ſaid, that "the heart of "man is deceitful above all things, and deſ-"perately wicked." Many there are in the religious world, and under the ſemblance of *eſtabliſhed righteouſneſs*, who are looking with a kind of religious diſdain upon, or indulging a kind of ſelf-righteous ſneer at, their fellow-mortals, in whom they think they diſcover weakneſs, or want of zeal, &c.

Such men ſeem as though they can hardly ſuſpect evil enough; little thinking at the ſame time, that they themſelves are ſo near as they

are

are to the kingdom of the evil one, who is the author of all uncharitableneſs, and the friend of all forward ſuſpicion!

Many there are, who are ſo little acquainted with the falſhood of their own hearts, "luſting "to envy," as not to know that they are in the ſpirit of wiſhing all the evil to be, which they ſurmiſe; and not ſeeing it come to paſs, they burn, but not with the holy fire of love. Theſe have their "zeal for GOD, but not ac- "cording to knowledge." Heaven grant, that the number of ſuch religious profeſſors may leſſen in Chriſtendom, and that the *charity* which rejoiceth not in iniquity, but which hopeth all things, and rejoiceth in the truth, may ſpread!

XLIX.

There are conſiderations of truth and error —advantages and diſadvantages of religious conduct, peculiar to every ſtate of mind, and all the circumſtances in which we ſtand.

Hence it ſeems to be, that calm and temperate men in every age, are feeling and proclaiming

claiming ſtrong impreſſions of mind reſpecting the main end of a religious life; and their doctrines of this kind have reſolved the ſum of the matter into *quietude*.

So far as religious aſſociation is conducive to the attainment of that *quietude*, it is valuable in a high degree. But when a conſcientious declaration of any particular belief, which the Holy Scriptures leave a man at liberty to receive or not, and injoin us not to fall out about, is found incompatible with the harmony of that aſſociation, and to excite ſentiments of unbrotherly affection, then *quietude* is deſtroyed, and the main end of aſſociation ſeems to be loſt.

L.

Notwithſtanding the difference of opinion which has ever been making its appearance in the ſentiments of men, ſeriouſly concerned for a right underſtanding, they may nevertheleſs be children of light in a dark world, and on that ground worthy of each other's love.

What a pity it is that ſuch men ſhould often find it more difficult to love and eſteem each other

other as brethren, than the worſt part of mankind do to conſider *them* with due reſpect!

LI.

The more ſeriouſly I conſider what the chriſtian religion is, in itſelf—that it primarily and ultimately propoſes, not an outward, but an inward work; an inward conviction of ſin; an inward belief in the neceſſity of a Saviour from the *power* of ſin; and a love of the Supreme Being, as the merciful ſource of all good in the heart—and thence a love towards men, as the children of GOD, and our brethren; the more am I conſtrained to fear the prevalence of a *party love*—the more I ſee the infirmity of bringing into religious conſideration, outward ſyſtems, and making account of outward differences of church œconomy:—

For as ſubſtances differ in form, varying as men's faces vary; and no *criterion* of truth, in formal matters, is divinely ſet up, either as a reality in itſelf, or as moſt pleaſing to GOD; ſo the ſincere in heart, under every form, are equally acceptable to GOD, and are univerſally the

the living ſubſtantial members of his univerſal church.

I am convinced that men always err in judging *any one* form neceſſary to ſalvation; and erring in that grand point, they err proportionably in ſhaping their love and fellowſhip according to this or that form.

Have we not all one Father? Are we not all ſinners? And muſt we not all be made righteous, through the *one* waſhing of our bodily affections, by the *one* pure water of regeneration; and the *one* influence of the blood of ſprinkling from an evil conſcience?

LII.

It hath been a query, not improperly agitated by ſome ingenious and liberal-minded men—a query which perhaps the forward ſpirit of church cenſure, in leſs enlightened times than the preſent, hath occaſioned;—*Whether it be the duty of any chriſtian church to excommunicate at all, even for matters of notorious immorality?*

I have often ſeriouſly reflected on the ſubject, without regretting that ſuch arguments ſhould have been urged, in oppoſition to the preſumption with which many have ruſhed into domination over their fellow-beings as GOD's ſpiritual vicegerents.

Our Saviour, the great pattern of wiſdom, and perfection of conduct, gave no precept to countenance it. And in the whole of his ſacred adminiſtration, no inſtance of ſetting poor ſinners at a diſtance, as unworthy of that kind of communion which he held amongſt men: Inſomuch, that one part of the accuſation brought againſt him was—"He eateth and drinketh "with publicans and ſinners."

He *taught* them, he *wept over* them, he *died for* them! But where did he ever command that ſinners, under his diſpenſation of *love*, ſhould be *caſt out?*

It is true indeed, that he eſtabliſhed no regular and diſtinct ſociety; and perhaps a diſtinct ſociety, circumſcribing itſelf by particular bounds of religious belief and œconomy, is not neceſſary to chriſtianity. But he ſhewed forth abundantly

dantly what the genius of his religion is—*pure love* (which worketh no evil) in ourſelves; and compaſſion towards others who are ſpiritually *impure*.

Such are the "loſt," and the ſpiritually "ſick," which are to be *recovered*. They need the help of the *phyſician*, the *goſpel phyſician*, who attends upon the ſick to recover and ſave them. They, having ſtrayed, ſo far perhaps as even to have loſt themſelves in the wilderneſs of ſin and tranſgreſſion, ſtand the more in need of the ſeeking patient care, ſet forth in the character of the good ſhepherd, to find, bring back, and reſtore them.

This may poſſibly be done, through that *love*, or a *degree* of that *love*, which is "the "ſpirit that was in CHRIST." Without it no good can ever be effected.

And even if ſuch care and ſolicitude ſhould fail of producing a penitent ſenſe of tranſgreſſion, and thereby prove ineffectual to a ſpiritual reſtoration, yet may it well continue doubtful how any good can ariſe, either to the ſinner or

the church, by excommunication and caſting as it were *away*.

For the ſinner is not likely to be *mended* by being *abandoned*. And the freeing of the church from the ſuppoſed *ſcandal* of his crimes, ſeems to be a needleſs work. For as no religious ſociety propoſes to countenance immorality, but evidently the contrary, ſo no *ſcandal*, ſtrictly ſpeaking, can lie on ſuch ſociety from the offences of an unexcommunicated ſinner.

The apoſtle Paul ſeems to have founded his advice to Timothy on this principle, when he only recommended *rebuke:* "Them that ſin "rebuke before all, that others may fear." 1 *Tim.* v. 20.

It is to be feared, that much of the zeal for excommunication among ſome religious profeſſors, hath grown more out of the unſuſpected pride of their own deceitful heart, than out of the pure "meekneſs of wiſdom."

Flagrant breaches of the moral law, being offences againſt civil ſociety, are more or leſs puniſhable,

puniſhable, according to their nature, by the civil authority inſtituted for that purpoſe; (for the magiſtrate is to be "a terror to evil-doers") but it remaineth to be ſhewn, on the principles of JESUS CHRIST, (who inſtituted no power of *puniſhment* in his church) that *excommunication*, which in the original church notion of it was "a preludium of the judgment to come," is a part of chriſtian divinity!

LIII.

The main principles of that chriſtian communion, which ſeems moſt uſeful and ornamental to men, and the moſt advantageous to any religious ſociety, may be defined thus:—A belief in GOD, as the adorable ſovereign ſpirit of the univerſe; in the divine character of JESUS CHRIST, as head of the ſpiritual church, and the declared mediator between GOD and man—between his Father, that dwelleth in the infinite light and glory of all perfection—and the preſent darkneſs and infirmity of poor human nature.

Reſpecting the mode of the exiſtence of GOD, and the mode of a mediatorial intercourſe, every

poor inadequate being muſt be left to conceive as he can.

The beſt doctrine for us to uſe one unto another, reſpecting this awful ſubject, is, to endeavour to conceive with "meekneſs and "fear;" and, believing in the energy of the divine preſence and power every where, to "re-"joice with trembling."

Under the awful weight of contemplation, which an attentive mind feels, it cannot but be a ſubject engaging the warmeſt thankfulneſs, that a mode of communication is appointed, and doth ſubſiſt, whereby we may know our duty and our greateſt happineſs, to be one and the ſame thing. That our duty lies, as laid down and enforced by our mediator and Saviour himſelf, in receiving and obeying his new, his ever new, but eternal law of *love*. And that the receiving and obeying this, through all the occurrences of the ſtate in which we are placed, is the reviving and renewing of our nature, and the actual fulfilling of his whole law of righteouſneſs.

Where theſe ſimple principles are received into the ground of the heart, and our affections are influenced by them, ſo far are received the living principles of the chriſtian religion, and ſo far is experienced and ſhewn forth, the nature of the chriſtian life. In ſuch minds there unqueſtionably ſubſiſts the main qualification for fellowſhip in any church of which CHRIST is head.

LIV.

In the midſt of the fury with which human nature preſſes to be avenged of injuſtice, or to puniſh even cruelty, men ſhould remember their old leſſon, the LORD's Prayer. We ſhould pray to our Father which is in heaven, to direct us rightly, between the wrath of our own ſelfiſh nature, and the extreme of that juſtice which may be due to ſociety in chaſtiſing for ſin.

Nothing leſs than the nature of that wiſdom, which comprehendeth the pure meekneſs and love of GOD, can direct us as the proper inſtruments of his juſtice. And if we are not ſo directed, in what we do or will, we ſhall be in danger

danger of adding to the moral diſorder, which our brother's tranſgreſſion againſt us may have already made.

LV.

It may be nearly as edifying to hear two fiſh-women ſcold about reputation, as two grave divines, or any two ſyſtematic religioniſts, diſpute about a right, or ſaving faith.

A right faith, ſay ſome, is independent of all conſideration of works, yet is ever bringing forth or deviſing good works—works of charity to human kind, &c.; and ſo far as ſuch works are not brought forth, or are not in all the thoughts of men, their faith is not right.

But true "faith worketh by love," and ſuch a faith as naturally and neceſſarily putteth forth good works, as a tree the fruit proper to its kind.

And wherever external circumſtances prevent the appearance of moral and religious works, equal to the inward ſtate of the mind, and the virtuous ſtrength of the will; it may be ſaid, for the encouragement of impotent believers, that the good device, or loving and charitable

Lent

bent of the will, is rewarded equally with an *external good work*, by the ſearcher of all hearts.

It is the prerogative of GOD only to know, as referrible to the hidden ſtandard of his own excellence, the *degree* of good which prevails in the fruit of the mind; and how far it is effectual to the preſent and eternal benefit of his creatures.

LVI.

Zeal for religion is too generally one of the moſt blinding and treacherous things in the world.

Mere zeal is ſo accuſtomed to dwell on the feeble reflections of peculiar faith, and peculiar works of devotion, as neceſſary to the *pleaſure*, which is reſolvable into the *happineſs*, of GOD (who is infinitely happy in his own perfections) that it raiſes a miſt of error all around itſelf, obſtructing the rays of reaſon, and giving a deep, fearful, and omenous tinge, even to the beams of the ſun of GOD's own righteouſneſs, ſhining into the heart.

LVII. Unleſs

LVII.

Unleſs a man have particular reaſons, and reaſons of publick good, for widely extending his temporal engagements, and eſpecially in the decline of life, it may in general be far better to avoid it. For beſides the great advantage of preſerving his mind the more quiet and eaſy, he will generally be better prepared to educate and guard his children, and aſſiſt them the more eaſily both by precept and example, to commence a ſafe and happy outſet in the world.

Add to this, that by having it in his power to keep his affairs in a regular and connected arrangement, he will feel himſelf ſo much the more like a man prepared for the great, approaching, and inevitable event, which the next moment may end all his labours.

And if we have a due regard to the eaſe of our friends who are to manage and finiſh our affairs after us; or to our own *reputation*, when that alone can be of any avail in our favour, a wiſe man will feel a proportionate care to ſecure, by his provident management, ſuch a chain of important objects.

LVIII. The

LVIII.

The conſideration which we naturally feel, at times, for the welfare of our relatives after us, ſhould not lead us into an over-anxious ſolicitude about the quantum of property which we may leave behind us.

A life of indolence on the one hand is, indeed, as bad as a life of the moſt rigid parſimony on the other. But both are to be avoided as ſinful.

The middle way, compatible with calm devotion and thankfulneſs to our GOD—with benevolence to ſociety, and the cultivation of right affections in thoſe dependant upon us, is the path of our duty.

All men who tread this path are not to be rich in worldly goods; though all men may become rich in *faith*—which, when exerciſed on the divine providence over all worlds, and all poſſibilities of things, is a ſpecie infinitely finer than gold—it is the currency of heaven—and that by which we may purchaſe an intereſt in the gracious benediction—*Leave thy fatherleſs children*,

children, I will keep them alive, and let thy widows truſt in me.

LIX.

Curius, who is ſaid to have had no money of his own, was offered a large ſum by the Samnites, but refuſed it, ſaying, "That he ſaw no "glory in having money, but in commanding "them who had it." A ſentiment quite in the character of a brave warrior.

But in the character of a man of peace, let *me* lay down, for myſelf, a different rule: I ſee no glory in having money; true glory conſiſteth in rendering one's ſelf ſuperior to them who have it, in knowledge and virtue.

LX.

Religion is a ſomething about which much hath been ſaid in all ages; but definitions of this ſomething have been extremely various and contradictory; and the cauſe ſeems to have been, that men have taken their views of it from different ſtations, with different motives, and under different prejudices.

Some

Some have repreſented religion as an arbitrary, capricious, and revengeful genius; not to be appeaſed for a breach of her ſuppoſed laws, but by the blood of armies, of old men and widows, mothers and ſucking children, and in ſhort, not without the utter extermination of whole provinces and kingdoms.

Others ſeem to have repreſented religion as an enemy to ſociety, requiring the ſequeſtration of her votaries within the walls of a gloomy priſon; a frequent abſtinence from food, and a perpetual one from the endearments of connubial aſſociation.

Others, again, have thought, or pretended to think, that ſhe is not to be ſatisfied without long and painful journies, ſometimes barefooted and bare-headed, through howling wilderneſſes and deſerts—proſtrations at tombs—the tombs of monſters, which weak and preſumptuous men made ſaints—and ſometimes not without whipping and mangling the poor body.

Some have maintained, that a confeſſion to the truth of certain dark and incomprehenſible propoſitions,

propoſitions, called articles of faith, was at leaſt half of the whole matter; while others have ſeemed to maintain, with equal confidence, that the whole matter was contained in that half.

Thus, and almoſt infinitely more various, are the pictures which different painters have given to the world of this *ſomething:* but what painters!

I will not ſay with Correggio, that "I alſo "am a painter;" but I will ſay with Elihu, that "I alſo will give my opinion."

If religion hath appeared to me, ſhe is the moſt amiable of all forms;—her ſtature is ſupremely tall—her limbs and features in the moſt perfect ſymmetry—her air ſerenely awful, and her countenance comely—bearing the expreſs image of youth and vigour, and tinged with an unfading bloom.

She is the eldeſt daughter of an eternal Father—bearing in her perſon the moſt ſtriking reſemblance of all his attributes.

She is clothed in white—the original raiment in which her Father clothed her, and which is remarkable for two peculiar properties—endleſs duration, and an utter incapacity of receiving the leaſt tarniſh.

Some people indeed, unawed and uncharmed by her preſence, have attempted by various means, and ſometimes from a moſt diabolical diſpoſition, to daub over and deſpoil her of her native beauty.

But thoſe attempts have ever proved ineffectual, as the ſurface of all her features was ſo exquiſitely ſmooth and luminous, as to be incapable of receiving any impreſſion from the groſſneſs of material ſubſtances, or any obſcurity from the fogs of human error and ſenſuality!

LXI.

The propagation of a free and rational enquiry into the grounds of religious eſtabliſhments, hath ever been oppoſed by the moſt zealous of prieſts, in all ages of the chriſtian church; it having been the intereſt of ſuch men

to

to ſupport ſyſtems, that ſyſtems might ſupport them.

To engage an implicit attachment in the people to them, and to ſecure a more eaſy dominion over the conſciences of the multitude; ſuch prieſts have always had the policy to repreſent the Deity as a GOD of *peace* and *order*; but whenever they have found it impracticable, by ſuch means, to keep the people in a quiet dependence upon them, and in a ſuperſtitious veneration of their uſurped authority, they have been the firſt to deſert thoſe fundamental doctrines, fomenting *war*, and the moſt abominable *diſorder*, to maintain that authority.

The diffuſive light of a generous philoſophic mind, is the moſt alarming of all moral occurrences to the tyrants of religious thraldom, becauſe the effects of ſuch a light are ever prejudicial to eccleſiaſtical uſurpation.

No wonder, then, that ſuch luminaries have been uniformly the objects of ſpiritual cenſure, in every country where the plague of mock-ſanctity hath made its way into dominion.

Among

Among the many important truths which hiſtory, the trueſt mirrour of humanity, enables us to lay down, this one is indiſputable—That wherever eccleſiaſtical power ſhall gain the aſcendant, perſecution ſhall await the devoted head of every rational and ſublime philoſopher!

It will be ſaid, perhaps, that theſe ſtrictures are more applicable to the conduct of the church of Rome, in former times, than to the ſpirit of the prieſthood in proteſtant communities now. I freely, cheerfully, and thankfully, grant the truth of the remark; I will go further, and venerate the characters of many proteſtant prieſts and teachers, both living and dead; I know we are not without many in this country, who are an honour to the miniſtry and to human nature; but ſuch inſtances are only to be expected in abundance, where eccleſiaſtical is ſubordinate to ſecular power!

LXII.

Whatever truth the mind of man comprehends and believes in, even through the exerciſe of that reaſoning faculty which he derives from GOD, the ſource of all comprehenſion,

and all ſpiritual communication, is, to all intents and purpoſes, a *revealed* truth.

The means by which a man is able to judge of, and acquire a belief in ſuch a truth, are not in his own power, neither the diſpoſition to uſe them. They are both the gift of GOD; conſequently every new acquiſition of knowledge, by and through the uſe of thoſe means, is the gift of GOD likewiſe. And what is a new acquiſition of knowledge on this bottom, but a real *revelation?*

Further, it ſeems impoſſible, ſtrictly ſpeaking, that there ſhould be any immediate revelation without the intervention of our reaſoning faculty. For all revealed truth, being deſigned to convey information, muſt be addreſſed to our *thinking principle*; and as that principle cannot be influenced to concluſion, but by ſome kind of evidence, every thing deſigned as a revelation muſt be attended with a ſufficient ſhare of evidence to influence that principle, or no revelation could poſſibly take place.

Hence

Hence it is inferred, that immediate revelation, and what is called human reaſon, are ſo far from being neceſſarily at variance, that if they be not eſſentially the ſame, yet are they ſo connected in their nature, that the one cannot ſubſiſt without the other.

From the ſame reaſoning may be inferred, the idleneſs of the diſtinction which ſome zealous people are endeavouring to keep up between them, and the abſurdity of decrying the uſe of reaſon, ſo much, in matters of religion.

And alſo, on the other hand, may be remarked, the abſurdity of the infidel, in ridiculing, as enthuſiaſtic and chimerical, the doctrine of revelation to men, in the ſecret and ſpiritual concerns of religion, and the heart.

LXIII.

God, who is equally good and wiſe in all his diſpenſations, muſt not be ſuppoſed to have planted in the human mind, any propenſity which was not deſigned to be uſeful to man, or any faculty which was not deſigned to be employed.

The mind of man is a ſpeculative and inquiſitive principle, (or call it what elſe you pleaſe) and delights in making diſcoveries—even while it may breathe an almoſt involuntary tribute of thanks to its Creator, for that aſſiſtance which it is conſcious of receiving from him, in the inveſtigation of every important matter.

How ſuitable therefore is it, to indulge this propenſity for ſpeculation, whether in natural or moral affairs, under the reſtriction of our ſober reaſon!

On what ſubject can this ſpeculative turn of the human mind be more properly and nobly employed, than in attempting to inveſtigate the works of the Creator? That capacity which *involuntarily* riſes above the planet that ſuſtains theſe bodies, cannot ſurely be out of its proper ſphere, while it contemplates the wonders of other planets, and reverently ranges into immenſity!

LXIV.

That worſhip of the mind which is performed "in ſpirit and in truth," whether it be in a congregation,

a congregation, or in private retirement, or in our lawful labour in the world, is the only worſhip which can become the dignity of a rational and immortal ſpirit;—the only worſhip that can produce any inward reformation, which is the one great *end*; and the only worſhip that we can be engaged in with a well-grounded hope of approbation from the uncreated, omnipreſent, and all-ſearching ſpirit.

LXV.

Our BLESSED SAVIOUR came into the world to eſtabliſh religion upon a ſolid foundation, and to give a lovely and perfect repreſentation of it, agreeably to eternal and immutable truth.

LXVI.

Without the devotion of the heart, in religious performances, there is no avail; without it all external ſanctity, and the moſt pompous outward ſolemnities, are altogether void of dignity, and no more to be accounted of than empty and vain amuſements.

LXVII.

The privilege of a ſimple and private worſhip, in the temple of a man's own boſom, is no new doctrine; it ſubſiſted before temples, or altars, the works of men's hands, were made:—

Before there were any external forms of devotion, or any fixed hours for aſſembling together to call on the name of the LORD; it was the appointed ſimple worſhip of Adam in paradiſe;—the divine principle of it had doubtleſs been co-exiſtent with the earlieſt intelligent creation: and on account of its own eternal fitneſs, it muſt endure for ever.

LXVIII.

CHRIST JESUS came into the world to call mankind from the form of religion to the ſubſtance: he came to inſtruct men that the Moſt High "dwelleth not in temples made with "hands:"—

That the grandeur of an edifice, and the fancied holineſs of its materials and utenſils, make no ſubſtantial part of a "reaſonable ſervice."

GOD

LXIX.

GOD hath teſtified of himſelf, that he delighteth not in the blood of rams and of he-goats, for "the cattle of a thouſand hills" are his:—He is to be worſhipped as a pure, incomprehenſible, glorious, and omnipreſent ſpirit, who wanteth not, and who delighteth not in the multitude of words, ſeeing that he diſcerneth all the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

LXX.

The ſcripture ſublimely ſaith, that "GOD "created man in his own image:" not, ſurely, in the corporeal and ſenſitive part of man; *that* could bear no reſemblance to a pure and infinite ſpirit:—

But what reſemblance man bore, was, doubtleſs, in the unpolluted capacity, and the kind and benevolent affections, of his nature.

The brightneſs of this image of GOD hath indeed been ſullied, and hath received much diminution by the prevalence of depraved affections; inſomuch, that it is an humiliating ſubject

ject of regret, how ſmall, in general, are the remains or traces of ſuch a divine reſemblance!

To bring the reflection home to the ſtate of our own minds, is ever neceſſary, and may be ever profitable.

But in the midſt of all our infirmities, it is at leaſt a laudable greatneſs of mind, to cheriſh a belief, that there is ſo much of the glorious image ſtill left, as to demand our reverent attention.

LXXI.

Whoſoever ſeriouſly and meekly attends to the operations of his own mind, may ſoon find ſufficient evidence there, to convince him that there is a GOD who made him; to whoſe goodneſs he owes all the faculties of his ſoul; to whoſe providence he owes all the bleſſings of his life, and by whoſe permiſſion it is that he exerciſes and enjoys them:—

That he is placed in this world, but as a creature of a day, haſtening to the place from whence he ſhall not return:—

That

That he is accountable for his conduct to the greateſt and wiſeſt of Beings, from the ſtrictneſs of whoſe juſtice he muſt have every thing to fear; but that he is exhorted to be humble and penitent, and caſt himſelf in hope upon the infinitude of *mercy*, and the infinitude of *goodneſs!*

LXXII.

The Creator of the univerſe, in that ſublime and beautiful order which he in his wiſdom hath eſtabliſhed, ſeems to have appointed continual leſſons of *inſtruction* to his rational creature man:—

We find nothing made apparently for its own uſe:—

Pre-eminence in nature ſeems to have been uniformly deſigned as the pre-eminence of communicating good.

If the luminaries of the ſky ſhine, with ſuperior ſplendour, over our heads, it ſeems as though they were principally intended to diffuſe light and heat,

heat, and impart joy and gladneſs beyond themſelves:—

If the mountains riſe above the plains, and receive the rains of heaven in greater abundance, they are not to imbibe and retain them unto themſelves, but to diſperſe them for the refreſhment of the inferior and more humble plains.

LXXIII.

To plead for the gratification of our ſenſual appetites and paſſions, in oppoſition to the ſtill ſmall voice of inſtruction, in the ſecret cloſet of our own minds, is to rebel againſt the plaineſt law of GOD—to inſult the Supreme Majeſty, by preferring the nature of brute animals, to that more exalted nature which he hath given us, and in which we ſtand related to angels:—

It is, in effect, to conclude that this life is more important than the next, and that a few fleeting moments of time are of more concern than eternity!

All

LXXIV.

All our hopes, and all our welfare, depend on the uſe of thoſe talents which the Almighty hath given us:—

If we ſuffer them to be corrupted and ſpoiled, the damage muſt be great, and the loſs irreparable.

On the other hand, if we are careful to employ them wiſely, and agreeably to their original deſign, our care will turn to the nobleſt account, and in joy and gladneſs ſhall we reap the fruit thereof for ever.

LXXV.

The man who earneſtly endeavours to lead a ſteady and uniform life of virtue, cheriſhing good in himſelf, and brotherly kindneſs and charity towards mankind, will ever find a ſource of conſolation and ſecret triumph within:—

He will find an indiſcribable glow of delight attend him, even under afflictions:—

The

The ſpirit of that man ſhall ſuſtain his infirmities!

LXXVI.

How little cauſe ſhall we find to murmur at the ſmall diſappointments and cares attendant on our preſent ſtate, if we reflect for a moment on the eternal weight of glory which is laid up for us, on condition of our keeping the word of the divine patience, to the end of our journey!

How amazing is the goodneſs of our Heavenly Father, that after a life of domeſtic tranquility (if compared with the lives of the firſt chriſtians and martyrs) we ſhall be admitted into the redeemed ſociety of the deeply perſecuted apoſtles, and ſervants of GOD in all ages; who, after ſuſtaining a life of ſorrow, and unutterable tribulation, have worn the crown of martyrdom into immortality! How animating the reflection to a feeling mind, and how productive of a refined gratitude, that after a life of comparitive eaſe and pleaſure, as a reward for our chuſing to be made happy in this world, we

we ſhall be received into the company of JESUS CHRIST himſelf, for ever!

LXXVII.

The frequent proofs we have of the inſtability and inſincerity of all terreſtrial *friendſhips*, ſhould excite our timely care to cultivate a friendſhip, which is of an infinitely more ſubſtantial nature:—

To ſecure, by our love, the unprecarious, unperiſhable friendſhip, of that everlaſting friend, who is *waiting to diſpenſe* of his favours in time and through all eternity!

LXXVIII.

There is nothing which can effectually bear up our minds, under the affliction of being ſoon ſeparated from our tender relatives and near friends, but a conſciouſneſs that we have acquainted ourſelves with GOD, and ſecured an intereſt in the everlaſting complacency of his name!

LXXIX.

It is our great buſineſs, and our great intereſt, under every afflictive diſpenſation of providence, to wait with an humble reſignation, in hope of the laſt grand revolution, when all diſtinctions, but thoſe of a religious and permanent nature, ſhall be no more.

The little diſtinctions of this lower world muſt ſoon come to an end, and that feeble luſtre with which ſome have been inveſted, and which they have ſo fondly magnified, muſt ſoon diſappear in the dawn of an everlaſting day, which the rich in faith, however poor in ſpirit, ſhall moſt aſſuredly ſee!

LXXX.

Happy are thoſe, and indeed happy are thoſe only, in every ſtation of human life, who raiſe their minds in contemplation towards that glorious intellectual eminence, where their natures may ſeem as it were, to be *caſt a-new*:—

Where they may be purified from much of the droſſy mixture, and alloy of human frailty; but

but brightened and refined, as to the ſterling luſtre, and genuine excellencies of the ſoul!

LXXXI.

A little ſerious reflection may always bring profitably home to our aid, under all difficulties, *this truth*—That the ſhort ſpan of time, ſignificantly likened unto "an hand's-breadth," will ſoon be over!

Then it will ſignify but little, whether we have gone down to the regions of the ſhadow of death, by an eaſy gradual deſcent, or by ſome ſudden and unexpected means!

Whether we have been toſſed by ſtorms and tempeſts, and frequently not comforted; or, have had a ſmooth and eaſy voyage to the harbour of eternal reſt!

LXXXII.

It is our duty, and all our happineſs, to attain that ſtate of mind, in which we can repoſe an unreſerved *truſt* in that Being, whoſe Almighty power can protect us:—

Whoſe

Whoſe unerring wiſdom will direct our goings, and whoſe infinite goodneſs will abundantly compenſate all temporary ſufferings, in a future undiſturbed enjoyment of his own peace, "which paſſeth all underſtanding!"

LXXXIII.

We cannot embrace, and diſmiſs as we chuſe, and at our own pleaſure, the privileges and enjoyments of religion.

A due reverence, and veneration of the Supreme Being, which alone brings us into the ſenſible benefits of his preſence, can be inſured to us only by our conſtant *humility*—by our unremitting care to cultivate an inward ſenſe of the infinite *difference* that ever ſubſiſts between Him and us:—

An inward ſenſe of his incomprehenſible majeſty, and ſpotleſs perfection; and of our own comparative meanneſs and inſignificance!

The conſtant remembrance of this littleneſs, weakneſs, and poverty of our own nature, is not to be dreaded, as the means of bringing into dejection

dejection and deſpondency; for while the religious mind is dwelling on the imperfections of itſelf, it is ſecretly elevating, by the ideas which it forms of the perfections of GOD, and by hopes of a future nearer approach to the habitation of his holineſs!

LXXXIV.

Reverence of the Supreme Being!—the Being to whom belongeth every adorable attribute, and whoſe awful preſence is in every place!—What a conſtant care ſhould be upon our minds to make that reverence appear—eſpecially when we mention his ſacred name!

But how miſerably ſhort do thouſands, and tens of thouſands, of every generation, ſeem to fall, and to have fallen, in this great point!

What can be a more manifeſt token of *irreverence*, if not of *depravity*, than to uſe in ordinary and trifling diſcourſe, that tremendous name, which all the hoſts of heaven—beings of the moſt exalted order and intelligence—venerate and adore!

LXXXV.

To urge the influence of cuſtom and habit in excuſe of the breaches of morality, and want of an awful reſpect to the Supreme Being, is to plead for the follies and wickedneſs of men, in oppoſition to the infinite wiſdom and immaculate purity of GOD!

LXXXVI.

That faith in JESUS CHRIST, to which the promiſes of ſalvation are made, is not a mere aſſent to any doctrines.

It is not a confident reliance on the mercy of GOD, in JESUS CHRIST, without a compliance with the invariable terms on which that mercy depends.

It is ſuch a receiving of CHRIST for our Saviour and Lord, as ſubjects the ſoul to his government, gives him the rule in the heart, and produces an uniform obedience to his ſacred laws.

It is, in ſhort, that "faith which worketh "by love, to the purifying of the conſcience "from all dead works."

LXXXVII.

No thoughts, ſurely, can be more true, or more conducive to profitable impreſſions of mind, than thoſe of the continued and unmerited *goodneſs* of the Almighty towards his creatures; and eſpecially towards his rebellious creature man.

Nothing ſurely is plainer, than that the Supreme Being is perpetually kinder to the worſt of men, than the very beſt of men can poſſibly deſerve!

LXXXVIII.

Nothing ſeems to be more natural to the human mind, than to lay hold of diſtinction, and ſwell with importance, on account of its own acquiſitions:

But many conſiderations ſhould be admitted, to humble the pride of ſuch ſelf-exaltation:

Among which, perhaps, this may be none of the leaſt proper, That natural diſeaſe, or a momentary accident, may reduce a man of the

moſt diſtinguiſhed knowledge to the condition of an idiot.

LXXXIX.

The really wiſe man will not ſet at nought his poor or his ignorant neighbour.

He will often anticipate the poſſible effects of that approaching day, which may remove every ſhadow of ſuch diſtinctions.

"When this earthly tabernacle ſhall be diſ-"ſolved," and the mind diſencumbered of all the weight, and cloud of infirmity, occaſioned by its connection with the body, the reputed wiſe, and the fooliſh, *may* be reduced to an equality.

When, at the end of this life, "that know-"ledge which is but in part ſhall be done away, "and that which is perfect ſhall come," there may no longer be any ſuperiority of *wiſdom* among beings of the ſame order.

XC.

If a poor, wavering, and unfaithful human being would gladly attain an idea of an adequate induce-

inducement to ſelf-mortification and virtue; where will he more eaſily find, or how could he *wiſh* more eaſily to find it, than in the doctrines of the goſpel of CHRIST?

They hold out, to the truly *humble*, the gracious promiſes of peace and tranquility in the life which *now is*, and the infinitely more glorious promiſes of an eternal life to come!—And that with an authority and plainneſs, no where elſe to be found!

XCI.

The bulk of mankind ſeems pretty uniformly of the judgment, that they ſhall be ultimately dealt with according to their works, whether they ſhall have been good or evil:—But notwitſtanding this belief, and this verbal confeſſion, it is an unhappineſs very general, and much to be lamented, that they are "living as "without GOD in the world."

So far are many men, eminently gifted, from occupying with the talents of grace committed to their truſt, that they ſeem more concerned to hide them in the earth (by works of dark-

neſs and ſenſuality) to their great reproach, and the greateſt of all danger!

They ſeem ſo unmindful of the ſolemn day of retribution, as very ſeldom to think upon it with ſerioufneſs.

"I know," ſaid Job, "thou wilt bring me "unto death, and to the houſe appointed for "all living." This acknowledgment, founded ſo fully on the convictions of every day, ſurely is the leaſt that might be expected from every being, who is himſelf the helpleſs object of ſuch an operation!

Not this acknowledgment merely in a man's words, but a moſt tender and earneſt ſolicitude is neceſſary, reſpecting an event which muſt ſeparate his ſoul from his body, and bring him, in all his imperfection, to the moſt piercing ſcrutiny, and the moſt juſt deciſion!

XCII.

The fading enjoyments of the preſent world may ſatisfy, for a moment, thoſe who are regardleſs

gardleſs about their future exiſtence in one which is eternal:—

But of all poſſible enjoyments here, there is none which can bear a compariſon with the enjoyment of that internal *light*, that paſſeth all the underſtanding of diſobedient men.

It is an enjoyment which gives to the mind of man the moſt delightful ſenſations, but cannot be deſcribed to the full.

The mind which has learned to delight in divine contemplation, and the love of the author of its being, has the moſt adequate, and indeed the only true and feeling conception, of "the "lifting up of the light of the divine counte- "nance," in the inward firmament of the ſoul!

XCIII.

While we rejoice in the feeling of that "grace of GOD, which bringeth ſalvation," and which "hath appeared unto all men"— we find ourſelves unable to comprehend its *eſſence*, any more than the eſſence of its cauſe.

But

But as we are injoined to "rejoice ever-"more, and in every thing give thanks," there is certainly a moſt abundant cauſe why we ſhould ſo rejoice and give thanks, on account of the good feelings which are excited in our minds, by the "light and love of GOD, ſhed "abroad there!"

That we ſhould ſo rejoice and give thanks, while we reſt ſatisfied, that *the knowledge of the eſſence* of the grace of GOD, which infidels have been fooliſhly aſking us for, is one of thoſe ſecret things which "belong to GOD," the ſource of wiſdom and of truth; and not any thing which relates to the temporal or eternal happineſs of us, or of our children!

In proportion as we become acquainted with its operation, in a life of ſeriouſneſs and humility, we find it correſpondent with many figurative deſcriptions of it, recorded in holy writ.

It is there ſpoken of, on account of its nutritive and ſuſtaining quality, under the figure of

of *bread:* and in many places of the ſame divine book, under thoſe of *water* and of *wine.*

Under ſuch figures the attentive religious mind feels and conſiders it with much delight.

It is called the "true bread from heaven:" *John* vi. 32.

This bread ſeems to have been typified in a very ſignificant manner, by that which the children of Iſrael were fed with in their journey through a deſolate wilderneſs, from the land of their captivity, towards the outward Canaan, the land of promiſe and of reſt.

They gathered their bread from the providential ſupply of manna that was ſent them every day. This manna was of ſuch a quality, that it would only ſerve for the uſe of the day—which ſeems to have been wiſely adapted for the purpoſe of keeping alive, in the minds of that people, a ſenſe of the mercy of that gracious GOD, and affectionate common Father, who ſo plentifully fed them.

They

They were injoined not to gather up more than would ſuffice them for the day—but to remember, and put their truſt in, that everlaſting arm that was able to ſuſtain them by the way.

And it ſeems, from the account of this marvellous providence, that "he who gathered "much had nothing over, and he who gathered "little had no lack."

This account may furniſh a leſſon of inſtruction to ſome, and adminiſter conſolation to others, who conſider themſelves as travellers on their way through the wilderneſs of this world.

In outward Iſrael, the bread with which men were furniſhed, was not to deſtroy their dependance, day by day, on him who gave it. They were not to gather food, and to eat as though they ſhould have no future need—and therefore they found by daily experience, that however great their gathering was, "he who "gathered much had nothing over."

So

So in the ſpiritual Iſrael, who are journeying towards the heavenly Canaan (the land of reſt, which is promiſed to the righteous, and his ſeed in the line of eternal truth) when men are favoured to partake of the ſpiritual bread, which comes down from GOD out of heaven, they can rejoice in the divine nouriſhment: and in the warmth of filial gratitude, are conſtrained to acknowledge, in the words of the poor prodigal in the goſpel, "In my father's houſe is "bread enough and to ſpare:" But reſpecting their individual ſtates, they find they have "nothing over."

On the other hand, there are ſeaſons wherein we are able to gather but little of this ſpiritual bread: but if we are faithful in *waiting* for it, and patient in abiding the pain of the ſpiritual hunger, the LORD Almighty, who looketh not as man looketh, but who is ever hearing the addreſs of the dependant ſoul—"LORD, give "me, day by day, my daily bread," will graciouſly regard us in his own time, and in the end give us abundant cauſe to acknowledge that we have "no lack."

XCIV. From

XCIV.

From the vaſt variety of principles of worſhip, and offices of devotion, held forth in doctrine, ſupplication, and praiſe—a variety too, which ſeems to produce ſatisfaction and comfort, in the minds of ſo many thouſands of individuals, in all ſocieties, countries, and ages of men, one great and moſt important truth may be gathered, and laid up in our boſoms, viz.

That it is not merely the ſentiment, or expreſſion employed by poor infirm beings, ſuch as we are, that can make us the acceptable worſhippers of the Divine Being; but the devotion of the heart itſelf, and the reality of our having that Being before us, as the object of our worſhip, or ſerious notice.

Were it poſſible for any human creature to obtain a true glimpſe of that adorable exiſtence, which belongs to the character of GOD; and of that eſſential agreement, and perfect union of excellency, ſubſiſting in that eſſentially glorious character; it is highly probable that there is no language, mode, or expreſſion of devotion among men, or even among celeſtial ſpirits, which

which could appear, at ſuch a moment, worthy, or worthily adapted to what we term—the *ſervice* of ſuch a Being:

On the contrary, it may appear moſt certain, that the *ſervice*, ſo called, which may claim the moſt obvious diſtinction for propriety of adaption, would be found to be the moſt ſilent awe, and the moſt ſimple inactive reverence, in the frame of the mind: Even ſuch a reverence as refrains from venturing into any voice or expreſſion at all.

Hence it may appear, that in the divine mind, there is no choice or preference given to modes of worſhip; at leaſt, where the ſincere love of GOD *himſelf* preſerves the infirmity of men from injuring, or willing to injure, one another, in this important and awful buſineſs.

Hence alſo may it be conſidered as ſupremely remarkable, that the mercy and benignity of the Being worſhipped, or profeſſed to be worſhipped, is infinitely extended over all the vari-

ety

ety of *ſincere infirmity*, in which we neceſſarily approach him.

A moſt important leſſon this, of inſtruction to us, and a moſt important law of charity and brotherly kindneſs to all thoſe who in every place call on the name of the LORD, the common Father and preſerver of all dependant creatures!

XCV.

Human nature is ever prone to error, and to look with a dangerous deſire on the path of unhappineſs.

The needful warfare of the paſſions, which is ſo proper to early life, though it may change the ſcene often in the courſe of many years, is rarely, if ever, to be diſcontinued with ſafety: That ſafety ſeems to ſtand in the *continuance* of the warfare.

And no ſooner do we relax in the diſcipline of ourſelves, and diſcontinue the advanced guard of our hearts, than we muſt expect to feel

feel the preſſing advances of the enemy of our ſecurity!

But early habits of watchfulneſs, in the cauſe of virtue, are ever favourable to a happy and laſting continuance of them.

And thoſe who have the happineſs of knowing that they have ſurmounted many difficulties, and have been delivered from many temptations, into a love of ſerioufneſs and truth, may often take comfort in a hope that they ſhall not eaſily depart from the guide of their youth, and the captain of their ſalvation!

XCVI.

It is difficult to ſay which is the moſt unpleaſant thing to conſider in the human character, an exceſs of *zeal*, or of *unbelief*.

But this ſeems pretty clear, that while a bigot is for ever diſtorting the moſt amiable doctrines of religion, and ſpreading uncharitableneſs in human ſocieties, the philoſophic infidel is more ſilently and decently employed, in

in his infidelity, with leſs danger of diſturbing or injuring the preſent or future ages.

It is a national unhappineſs to have *writers* of either claſs.

We tremble, and indeed very juſtly, for the effect of books of infidelity, eſpecially when written apparently with a view to leſſen the diſtinctions between practical virtue, and vice:

But we have, perhaps, equal cauſe to tremble for the conſequence of poſitions and doctrines, advanced by ſome well-meaning, but narrow-minded church-men, of different churches.

It has been the opinion of ſome wiſe and good men, that groſs errors in theology may do more miſchief in a ſtate, than written errors of juriſprudence:

For while the latter are ſeldom ſtudied much, but by perſons of diſcernment and abilities ſufficient for the moſt part to guard them againſt a monſtrous and hurtful abſurdity, the former are too often regarded by weak and implicit people

people as ſacred, becauſe found in *books of religion*:—And ſo the evil influences of ignorance and deformity ſpread.

It may be a ſubject of unſatisfactory enquiry, to which of thoſe cauſes religious and civil ſociety is indebted for the greateſt number of calamities:—

But it is the part of a wiſe man to guard againſt the influence of either extreme, and ſet the example of an humble, and ever friendly enquiry for himſelf!

XCVII.

It is no uncommon argument among ſome orthodox profeſſors, of different ſocieties, that the real members of the church of GOD and of CHRIST muſt all neceſſarily have the ſame faith, and ſpeak the ſame language, as to the articles of religion.

An argument this, with which many well-meaning people of different deſcriptions are ready, on moſt occaſions, to ſhew their zeal, their knowledge, and their piety:—

The argument, ſuch as it is, ſeems to be drawn from the doctrines of the *unalterableneſs* of the Almighty, and the *unity* of JESUS CHRIST, who *is not divided*; but with all reverence granting the unity and perfection of the divine attributes, I muſt here obſerve, that ſuch argument, which implies in itſelf a *difference of human conception and judgment*, doth not help us at all to a diſcovery of the *teſt*, by which we can know preciſely *who* the only right believers are.

It hath often been ſaid, that we may moſt reaſonably expect to find the true *faith* on the ſide of the *church*;—by which word *church* every man means that particular people, large or ſmall, ancient or modern, popular or unpopular, with which he happens to be in connection.

It might be urged in reply to this commonplace reverence for *the church*, this implicit deference to the wiſdom of aſſociated bodies, that errors of the firſt magnitude have been ſometimes found, foſtered in the mother's boſom:—

But

But errors of the multitude, and of the church, have often, if not always, been detected, and ſucceſsfully expoſed by the ſagacity and reſolution of *individuals*:—

The ſtrong holds of thoſe errors, which had been defended long by the *larger*, from motives of intereſt, pride, habits of enthuſiaſm, or bigotry, have been broken through by the *ſmaller* number:—

And a greater reſemblance of truth has been confeſſedly brought forth, by bold and ſincere adventurers, who have been afterwards celebrated for their wiſdom, piety, and ſervices; though they were at firſt branded as ſciſmaticks, turners of the world upſide-down, and enemies of the unity of the Church of GOD!

But under the difficulties, in which theſe conſiderations may ſometimes involve our thoughts, we are yet furniſhed with all proper reſources of ſatisfaction and peace:—

We have only to regard the privileges of our reaſonable, dependant, and accountable nature

—a nature made reaſonable by GOD himſelf, and wholly dependant on, and accountable to *him*, for our higheſt mental ſatisfaction and enjoyment.

To *him*, therefore, and to that happy employment of lifting up our hearts towards *him*, which may open the door of a more ſenſible intercourſe, and give us the beſt feeling of a communion which is to be enjoyed without anxiety and without boaſting—*let us have recourſe!*

If we do not feel ourſelves *called* to any work of oppoſition, to the prejudices of men; or any open attempt at reformation of errors, let us bear thoſe views of inconſiſtency and weakneſs, which we muſt neceſſarily have, with patience and reſignation.

If we grow weary of a multitude of books, let us read only thoſe few, which ſeem to us really intereſting and good.

If we can be content with one book, the moſt excellent of all, *i. e.* the *Bible*, our taſte and

and deſire become more ſimplified, and eaſy of ſatisfaction.

If in the Bible itſelf we find ſome things hard to be underſtood, or unedifying to our minds, we may contract our reading to the practical divinity of the New Teſtament:—

And if we would only have *that*, pure and holy as it came from heaven, we may read perpetually THE SERMON UPON THE MOUNT!

XCVIII.

Among the numerous *imaginary* cauſes of unhappineſs in this world, is ever to be reckoned *imaginary poverty*—or a want of the means of procuring eaſily thoſe things which make others diſtinguiſhed.

How ſeldom do the beſt of us advert to the ſmall effect that ſuch abilities have, where they are poſſeſſed, in producing real happineſs!

We ſee many, and indeed perpetual inſtances of diſcontent and anxiety, among thoſe who ſeem to have no reaſonable impediment

to an uninterrupted enjoyment, and application of thoſe riches, which they poſſeſs in great abundance:—

Many, though not more remarkable than their neighbours for vicious habits and diſpoſitions, ſeem not to be ſenſible of a reaſonable motive to *uſe* their wealth, either for the comfort of others, or the benefit of themſelves.

And a man, having an apparent abundance of riches, without the capacity for *uſing* them to his own ſatisfaction, may be conſidered as no object of envy.

He may indeed be not unaptly compared to a perſon who has a mountain of gold by his ſide, and yet happens to be ſituated in a country where he cannot purchaſe with it any food, that yields him a pleaſant flavour!

XCIX.

It is a common, though vulgar ſaying, that "a man is either a fool or a phyſician at forty." How far mankind at that age are generally qualified, either from nature or obſervation, to judge

judge of bodily diſeaſes or remedies, may be but a fruitleſs, and therefore an idle ſpeculation. Neither is it of any high importance to beings made and circumſtanced as we are, to know by what kind of malady we are beginning to make our decline towards the houſe appointed for all living.

We muſt ſoon, at fartheſt, approach towards the final period, which ſo few are willing to conſider as near at hand. And as all maladies ſhould be borne with fortitude and patience, and every individual has his allotted ſhare of them; it is of comparatively ſmall importance what thoſe maladies are, provided we have not brought them upon ourſelves by our own intemperance.

But at the age of forty, the more obſervant of mankind will generally have noticed peculiarities and tendencies in the natural conſtitution of their bodies—will have obſerved what kind of aliments conduce moſt to their general health; what degrees of exerciſe, ſtudy, or recreation, ſerve moſt to the ſame end; and perhaps which, amongſt the more ſimple aids of

of medicine, may be moſt friendly and reſtorative.

Many however, it is to be feared, from diſregard to the welfare of their bodies, as well as their minds, will be found too ignorant for that period of life, and therefore muſt come under the deſcription of fools, rather than of phyſicians.

But the age of forty is a ſerious period in the general term of human exiſtence. Men may generally then make a moſt important caſting up of the moral and religious account of human life. It is then time for the ardour of youthful expectation to have ſubſided, and for a ſerious retroſpect of the paſt to take place, and check the anticipation of future ſchemes, and viſionary plans of worldly diſtinction and happineſs.

The vanity of human nature ſhould then, at leaſt, have attained its meridian, if not have ſubſided by the preſſure of conviction—how little this world can furniſh worth ſetting the heart upon, how tranſitory its fancied pleaſures,

pleaſures, and how ſhort its moſt endearing friendſhips!

By this period of life the leſſon may generally have been fully learned, that "to every "thing there is a ſeaſon, and a time for every "purpoſe under heaven." Every intelligent perſon may, by this time, have learned to contemplate connections broken, and never more to be repaired. Many of the companions of our early youth, as well as perſons whom we had been accuſtomed to conſider with reverence, will have paſſed away before us, and have entered *the undiſcovered country, from whoſe drear bourn no traveller is permitted to return with intelligence:*—

The circle of our oldeſt acquaintance will have been greatly thinned; and if we would be leſs ſolitary, we muſt be looking towards another generation, frail as the former, to fill up the places of thoſe friends whom we have loſt.

But that ardour of youthful affection, once natural to the human breaſt, having ſubſided, through

through the mortifications of diſappointment, into cooler and more cautious thought—will be wanting to aſſiſt us in forming thoſe attachments, which had yielded our former delight.

The growing idea of the infirmities of nature, and the humiliating ſcenes of diſſolution, will neceſſarily become often preſent to our minds, and lead us to the ſerious and wiſe ejaculation, "LORD, what is man, and what "are all the fancied felicities of the ſons of "men!"

The delighted youthful huſband and father, will frequently have begun to change, perhaps have long changed, into the diſappointed and ſolicitous head of a family—looking for conſolation in the viciſſitudes of life, only through a *penſive* truſt in the inviſible Father, and Head of the univerſal family. No other encouraging ſource may remain in the view of the mind, for poſſibilities of ſafety and happineſs, through the opening valley of the ſhadow of death!

The

The painful and tender mother, by this time, generally feels the weakening effects of child-bearing, and maternal aſſiduities. And thoſe pledges of mutual endearment, which heretofore were the pleaſant fruits of connubial intercourſe, begin to become objects of ſerious trial and anxious uncertainty: and the careful reflections of Rebecca are brought home to the parental boſom: "if Jacob alſo take a wife of "the daughters of the land, what good ſhall "my life do me!"

Affectionate children, whoſe parents have ſeen them advance to this period of life, muſt now be daily reckoning on the courſe of nature, which ſhall ſoon remove their venerable parents from their ſight—leaving them to the quick ſucceſſion of grey-hairs, decrepitude, pains, and diſſolution. Thus the language of the prophet becomes familiarly remembered—"man goeth to his long home, and the mour-"ners go about the ſtreets!"

To ſum up the importance of this period of human life—this ſeems to be about the natural ſtage when our levity becomes ſuſpended, and real ſerioufneſs at length begins.

Some happier and more provident minds will earlier have anticipated the importance of ſerioufneſs, and have been timely preparing to accompany the ancient in the ſchool of wiſdom:—

Others, ever prone to be behind-hand with buſineſs of the firſt importance, or to ſleep like a centinel on his poſt, will be found careleſs amidſt the ſurrounding world of urgency and danger; and will be at laſt inevitably overtaken in the unprepared character of "a fool."

But happy are thoſe, who, regarding the health and well-being of the *mind* more than of the *body*, are improving, to the beſt of purpoſes, every period of life, by timely and virtuous conſideration.

C.

Among the numerous objects that ſtrongly attach us to this world, and make us look with reluctance towards another, perhaps none is more ſtrong, becauſe none more fully abſorbent of the mental powers, than the love of Learning.

The

The love of many other things becomes gradually weakened by the leſſening of the powers of enjoyment. The love of money, perhaps, may be as ſtrong as that of literature, if not more ſo—and as conſtant a companion to the grave. But literature, to perſons of fine taſte and judgment, has charms ſuperior to almoſt every other ſubject: and, perhaps, in proportion as activity becomes irkſome to ſtudious perſons, the love of tranquility, or ſilent converſation, becomes naturally more grateful.

Neither are we to wonder at the proofs which learned men ſometimes give, of ſtrong reluctance to quitting this world. They may have as ſtrong a belief as the more illiterate, in the doctrines of a future ſtate, and the happineſs of immortality. And they may feel, as powerfully, the mortifications attendant on this ſtate of being. But having been accuſtomed to place their affections on thoſe things, which to them have been the means of wiſdom, and a brilliant ſpecies of entertainment—the perpetual feaſt of ſober reaſon, inſtead of the gratification of diſorderly paſſions; ſuch men are leſs

leſs affected by the decay of the body, becauſe the mind remains clear and vigorous.

Add to this, that whatever men have been long accuſtomed to dwell upon with delight, muſt neceſſarily appear a matter of durable importance to them: the improvement of letters and philoſophy, which a regular ſtudent has delighted to conſider as a good, he has generally been accuſtomed to purſue with *fondneſs*, and progreſſive *admiration*.

Thoſe improvements become objects of a kind of *paternal* concern: and ſuch a ſtudent knowing that the *ne plus ultra* of improvement is yet to be diſcovered, naturally feels a reluctance at the thought of being taken from the objects of his attention, before they have received their complete diſplay of uſefulneſs and of beauty. And it cannot but be in ſome degree mortifying, that the fulneſs of diſcovery, like the entrance of the promiſed land to Moſes, muſt be reſerved for others, perhaps leſs laborious in the literary travel!

The

The advantage mainly to be propoſed to ourſelves, in the commencement and purſuit of learning, is, ſimply to deſire to extract ſo much of its eſſence, as may be ſuited to the peculiar ſcope of our faculties and our preſent ſtate; which to enjoy, and be content with, in the limitation of our mortal powers, is equally as rational as our being content with our ſufficient ſhare of meat and drink—the future abundance of which will be as much the natural right, as the temporary comfort of ſucceeding generations:—

And laſtly; to cultivate a perſuaſion, that whatever can be valuable in the eſſence of wiſdom, is capable of being more augmented when our ſtate ſhall become changed from temporal imperfection into the unembarraſſed and permanent privileges of eternity.

CI.

If things were once eſtimated according to their intrinſick value, it would require but little conſideration for us to be convinced, that the hearty reception of one moral, philoſophical truth, tending to confirm the doctrine of moderation

deration and contentment, is better than all the ſuperfluities of riches and honours.

CII.

It is but the part of a weak and inconſiderate, as well as of an envious man, to triumph at the loſs of another's reputation—even though a *rival*, either living or dead; for beſides the general frailty of human nature, by which he himſelf is liable to fall into ſtill greater diſgrace; it behoves him to conſider that ſuch is the captiouſneſs of mankind, and ſuch the irrational clamour of party, that his own very excellencies, if he has any, will ſurely be brought into reproach. He will be abuſed and ſlandered, in ſome degree, while he lives—and ſo long as human nature remains what it is, his grave may be an aſylum for his body, but no ſecurity to his reputation.

CIII.

It may at leaſt be ſaid as a *truth*, if not by way of argument againſt thoſe ſcepticks who reject the idea of a poſſible intercourſe with departed good ſpirits, that it is no wonder they are generally without evidence of ſuch intercourſe.

tercourſe. For were the moſt heavenly angel to take up, for a ſeaſon, a ſenſible reſidence among men, and to teach heavenly wiſdom, in oppoſition to ſenſuality, he would be ridiculed and ſlandered, and made, if poſſible, unhappy.

CIV.

A man who is reputed to have been abuſed and perſecuted, ſhould have an eſpecial care not to value himſelf on account of the friendſhip and ſympathy which any perſon may ſhew towards him as a ſufferer. For let his cauſe have been ever ſo weak and indefenſible, ſome perſons will be ſure to eſpouſe it, and give him their pity and countenance, perhaps for no better reaſon than becauſe he is a ſufferer.

CV.

It will of courſe be, while human nature remains what it is, that ſome people will prefer going an older, and more beaten, while others will chooſe a newer, and as they think, a more eligible way, in the purſuit of the one great end of every ſerious traveller—heaven. Theſe different choices will be made from different cauſes, operating on the human mind. As

for inſtance—*timorouſneſs*, about departing from old cuſtoms for fear of *danger*. This may proceed from a kind of weakneſs, ſimiliar to that frequently occaſioned in childhood, by ignorant ſtories, and which ever after deters ſome people from going abroad after dark, eſpecially into ſome obſcure places, for fear of ſpirits or evil apparitions!

Credulity may proceed from a more amiable cauſe or infirmity—that of being eaſily pleaſed, or ſatisfied with any thing, not immediately felt as an evil.

In others, credulity may proceed from a natural love of indolence—a diſlike of mental exertion, in ſpiritual concerns, correſpondent with an indolence which characteriſes them in their general conduct.

In others, credulity may ariſe from a too humble opinion of themſelves, and of their right and ability to ſeek ſatisfaction in their own thoughts and enquiries, while others may poſſibly be wiſer, and more authoriſed to point out and preſcribe their moſt proper belief and practice.

In others, a profeſſed earneſtneſs of belief and practice may be the reſult of conſtitutional fervor, and a liking to ſuperior zeal, in whatever kind of purſuit they happen moſt fully to engage, and to deem of greateſt moment.

So that, admitting *ſtability in orthodoxy* to be at all a virtue, people are often, in that reſpect, virtuous in different degrees, and in different ſhapes of degrees, in proportion as they have been under the influence of ſuch natural and accidental cauſes.

CVI.

It muſt be acknowledged, as a general truth, that man cannot be more worthily inquiſitive than how he may beſt employ his time, or that portion of his time, which he may be able to redeem from the neceſſary troubles of this world? To be wholly immerſed in action, even of the more reputable kind, were but to be engaged in a more reputable kind of ſlavery. If a true eſtimate could be made, even of much reputed laudable activity, how mortifying would it be, to a ſerious and wiſe man, to find, how many of his efforts and anxieties might have

been ſpared, without any real diſadvantage to ſociety! And GOD himſelf, to whom the value of all our beſt-intended employments ſhould be humbly referred, is infinitely exalted above the poſſibility of being made more happy by any thing which we can do.

How large a proportion of mankind are there apparently ſtraining every nerve to grow greater, as they think, by the poſſeſſion of more wealth and more influence over their fellow-beings! But what is this, but to increaſe trouble, and augment envy?

The purſuits of the artizan are commonly applauded, and placed to the general credit account of improvements and convenience. If variety of elegance, form, and facility, in human works, were eſſential to human happineſs and pleaſure, or to the general accommodation of mankind, much exertion in mechanic arts, and the practice of the greateſt ingenuity, would ever be publick and ſocial virtues: but man may be more ſimply, and conſequently more greatly happy in thoſe purſuits, and the modes and degrees of thoſe employments, which

which are moſt immediately productive of the ſupply of nature's wants; of the health of the body, and an unperplexed ſtate of the mind.

CVII.

Nothing is a more obvious, or generally acknowledged truth, than that it is impoſſible to pleaſe all men; and indeed that man is exceedingly unwiſe or inconſiderate, who, in any action or undertaking, expects to eſcape cenſure from all quarters: it is enough that he undertakes nothing but with a good deſign, and endeavours all he can to guard againſt giving a reaſonable cauſe of offence to any one.

The far greater part of the foregoing "Maxims and Thoughts" were written without any conſideration of praiſe or blame, becauſe without an intention of publication.

The ſtep laſt taken, of bringing them into publick view, is therefore that alone which requires any apology: and the only apology which their author can now make, is a very ſhort one; *he has arranged and brought theſe ſentences before his readers with a good intention*;

and humbly hopes, that if the wiſe and the religious cannot profit by them, the unwiſe, the irreligious, and the proud, will not have read them without ſome ſeaſonable inſtruction, admonition, or rebuke.

A CON-

A

CONTINUATION

OF THE

FOREGOING DESIGN

IN

REFLECTIONS

ON

SELECT PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE.

BRITISH MUSEUM

REFLECTIONS

ON

SELECT PASSAGES OF SCRIPTURE.

I.

In the beginning GOD *created the heavens and the earth.* Gen. i. 1.

TO a mind acquainted with the happineſs of ſerious thought, there cannot but be ſomething greatly intereſting in this opening of the firſt book, of which we have any certain account. And the importance of it is increaſed by the ſolemn nature of the ſubject.

Conſidered merely as the firſt piece of literary compoſition, there muſt be a peculiar propriety in the divine penman's beginning with the name and operations of that original and eternal Being, from whom proceeded not only inſpired language, but the creating *fiat*, by which

which all other things exiſt. The manner of beginning this writing is remarkably ſuited to the wonderful theme.

Moſes, though inſpired from heaven for this and other great purpoſes, of which we have ſo large an account, found himſelf in the predicament of the wiſeſt of men in all ſucceeding ages, unable to open the inexplicable myſtery of the divine nature—the mode of exiſtence peculiar to eternal omnipotence. To deſcribe the abſtract nature of the Almighty was not within the poſſible limits of inſpired wiſdom.

Doubtleſs this firſt great recorder of original events, muſt have felt the weight of reflection reſulting from a conſciouſneſs of his own inadequate powers, and have trembled under it. "LORD, who is ſufficient for theſe things!" muſt have been the reverent language of his whole heart. But feeling this neceſſary imperfection of his nature, he could ſet down only the words with which the inſpiration that was given him, opened—"In the beginning GOD "created the heavens and the earth."

Such

Such a revelation was a call to the exerciſe of a principle, inſeparable from the ground of all religion, through all ages of time, and all the poſſible conceptions of eternity; and that is, FAITH: by which I would be underſtood to mean, in this place, a neceſſary belief in the ſubſtance (or reality) of things *not ſeen*, and *not underſtood*.

And ſeeing this was a conſequence of the neceſſary ignorance (in ſome degree at leaſt) of a created nature, it may well be urged in oppoſition to that ſpirit of unbelief which ſprings more out of the pride of human nature, than from any right that a poor mortal being can have, to arrogate to himſelf a privilege of refuſing to believe every thing ſpiritual, which in his own natural ignorance he cannot comprehend. A certain degree of ignorance is an original and *neceſſary* attribute of a created Being.* And *faith*, without comprehenſion, is

* This remark, which we may venture to call a truth, is applicable not only to man, in his preſent and original ſtate, but alſo to ſuperior orders of creation. It has been a queſtion among ſome ſerious men, whether *angels* were created angels; or were, and are, the ſpirits of inferior beings, *made more perfect by a*

therefore

therefore as neceſſary a law upon him, as the imperfection of his conſciouſneſs. To be ever mindful of this, and ever humble, as in the preſence of an incomprehenſible Creator, is then equally the duty and the wiſdom of ſuch a being as man.

A diſpoſition rather to be confirmed in ſcepticiſm than to cultivate modeſty, and an humble enquiry after truth, will rarely be corrected by arguments drawn from ignorance; but with ſuch a diſpoſition I ſhould be backward to plead at all. Some there are that *pretend*, at leaſt, to doubt, not only the common doctrines of *one eternal firſt cauſe*, but their own exiſtence as identified beings, notwithſtanding the ſenſations and motives to action which they have and acknowledge in common life.

But the buſineſs of religious exhortation is with thoſe who, admitting as realities the appearances of animal life and activity, are only

change of ſtate? But admitting (for argument's ſake) that they were created angels, ſtill it is inferred, that they alſo muſt have been created (with reſpect to the one omniſcient being) in a ſtate of relative imperfection.

ſcepticks

ſcepticks with regard to ſuch things as they cannot reconcile to their ideas of natural cauſe and effect: ſuch, for inſtance, may withhold their aſſent to the truth of the *miraculous conception* of our Bleſſed SAVIOUR. And, perhaps, for two main reaſons—becauſe they cannot *comprehend* the *mode* of ſuch a conception, and becauſe they cannot *diſcern* any particular neceſſity or uſe, in ſuch an event *ſo* taking place.

But I would aſk them, how much more ſatisfactorily to themſelves they can ſolve the common operations in reſpect of generation and growth? They cannot only not underſtand "how the bones do grow in the womb of her "that is with child," but they muſt ever remain unable to *comprehend*, how any communication of outward bodies, either animal or vegetable, can *produce* or *propagate* a principle called ſpirit, or life—a principle different in itſelf from the abſtract nature of matter?

In ſhort, ſuch is our poſitive weakneſs, and incapacity for *comprehenſion*, that ſtrictly ſpeaking, it may well be ſaid—*we know nothing at all!* Yet are we capable of enjoyment and happineſs,

happineſs, on principles which we are inwardly, as well as in Holy Writ, taught to conſider as right. We are capable of enjoyment, in proportion as we meekly and willingly yield our obedience to thoſe impreſſions of reverence and goodneſs, which are given us; and this enjoyment needs not the aid of curious and logical inveſtigation, to make it ſweet to our taſte.

I would therefore urge, from a motive of refined and moſt happy ſelf-love, that we ſhould endeavour to cultivate a ſerious belief in the ſacred doctrines of the divine exiſtence; alſo in the ſuperintendance and providence of that GOD, *who in the beginning created the heavens and the earth*; and, by faith in his adorable attributes, endeavour to keep our minds open for all the bleſſed benefits that are to flow from the revelation of his goſpel.

II.

And GOD *ſaid, let there be light, and there was light.* Gen. i. 3.

IT hath been reckoned no inconſiderable advantage of human literature, to be able to mark

mark the various beauties of compoſition, and refer them to diſtinct and proper claſſes. Many have been the books written expreſsly for ſuch purpoſes, and the work hath been obſerved to employ much of the attention of learned men, in the latter part of their lives. They ſeem, indeed, to have conſidered abilities for this employment, as a kind of *reward*, in the decline of life, for the pains which their youthful ſtudies had coſt them. To reliſh and admire what are uſually called the *beauties of the ancients*, the ſkill and addreſs of Pagan philoſophers, orators and poets, hath been no uncommon boaſt of a multitude of profeſſed chriſtians, as well as deiſts and free-thinkers, of modern times.

Some, indeed, have been wiſe enough to turn their attention to the ſacred Scriptures, and give a decided preference to the divine beauties of language and ſentiment ſo abundant in them. Such a preference can never be too general, and the good man cannot but rejoice in the prevalence of ſuch a taſte, which, while it ſhall ever do credit to the judgment of the human mind, muſt be attended with proportionably

portionably happy effects to civil and religious ſociety; but thoſe effects are beyond deſcription happy in the minds of men ſo employed; as their uniform tendency is, to enlighten the underſtanding, invigorate and ſublime the heart, and excite in it a fervent ſolicitude after the knowledge of GOD.

The words above quoted have deſervedly engaged the notice of ſuch men: and though the beauty and dignity of ſacred language be great and various, beyond all human deſcription, yet may it perhaps be ſafely ſaid, that there is no one paſſage more ſublimely beautiful in itſelf, than this deſcription of the origin of manifeſted *light*. "And GOD ſaid, let there "be light, and there was light."

It is certain that no created powers of intellect can reach to an adequate idea of ſo wonderful an operation of divine power. It is a theme that may well employ the devout meditation of the higheſt poſſible orders of created ſpirits. But under theſe convictions of *our* minds, we can never ſufficiently reverence that goodneſs, which hath not only created a marvellous

vellous outward light, but which is calling us to an acquaintance with a marvellous light of his own divinity—ſhed, and deſigned to be ſhed abroad, with increaſing luſtre in our own hearts!

Divinely did the royal Pſalmiſt ſay of man, "Thou haſt made him a little lower than "the angels, and haſt crowned him with glory "and honour." Next to our obvious incapacity for comprehending the infinite glory of our Creator, may poſſibly be reckoned our incapacity for experiencing (involved as we are in mental darkneſs) the exceeding bleſſedneſs of that ſtate, which ſtood in the firſt light, and unviolated order of Paradiſe! But the tender mercies of the great Creator of all poſſible good, are over all his works—and towards us his compaſſions fail not. He hath called us to a belief in his own reſtoring power, and to prepare for the inheritance of more than original light and glory.

How ſhall we conceive with ſufficient adoration and thankfulneſs of ſuch a theme as this? Shall it not proſtrate our ſouls continually be-

fore GOD, and inſpire us with every poſſible motive to deſire after that redeeming, that new-creating power, which only cometh down from Him, the Eternal Father of lights?

It is needleſs to dwell here on the darkneſs and miſery of our natural propenſities to evil. We are largely inſtructed in thoſe doctrines throughout the Holy Scriptures, and we may *feel* them to be true, beyond the ſhadow of a doubt.

It is not more certain to a ſerious perſon, who attends to his feelings, and the various operations of his own mind, that there ever was a ſtate of chaotick darkneſs, antecedent to the created light of the firmament, than that there is in himſelf, as a natural being, a mental darkneſs—a chaos and confuſion of ſenſibility, from which he cannot deliver himſelf.

Children, indeed, may be ſaid to differ in the brightneſs of their capacities which they have from nature; but then this difference conſiſts more in a quickneſs of thought, and readineſs of ſpeculation, reſpecting the different

objects of ſenſe, than in any luminous inherent power of removing difficulties, which occur to their fancies; as ſatisfying, for inſtance, their young and inquiſitive minds about their firſt notions of the abſtract nature of GOD, or the marvellous works of his all-creating power.

Hence the numerous ſuppoſitions, and little queſtions of curioſity, with which they are ſo frequently wont to amuſe and puzzle their friends; who, indeed, ſtrictly ſpeaking, with regard to attainments in the knowledge of the divine œconomy, are but children of a larger growth.

And as human beings advance in life, and arrive at what is reckoned the meridian of underſtanding, though they may have accumulated ideas, and by converſation and ſtudy have learned to arrange their thoughts in ſome kind of order, acquiring habits of obſervation and judgment, ſufficient to guide them along thro' the neceſſary offices of ſociety; yet, as mere natural men, are they ever encompaſſed by the gloom of uncertainty, danger, and fear. The outward ſun ſhines upon and warms them, and

they can ſometimes rejoice in his genial influence; but, even as the darkneſs of an outward night returns upon them, ſo returns and abides the ſenſation of an inward darkneſs, (with reſpect to their being, allotment, and end) which no powers of mental activity can diſpel, and be unto them a ſource of ſatisfaction and comfort

The paſſions which they feel, continually urging and agitating their minds, the painful occurrences which aſſail them, like the ſtorms and tempeſts of the elements, ſerve alſo to vary and heighten their anxiety, and render the darkneſs of the ſcene more awful and tremendous.

This we may ſet down as the general allotment of human nature. Various may be, and doubtleſs are, the degrees of this ſenſibility, according to the natural caſt or complexion of the human mind. And we may be ſo variouſly conſtituted and circumſtanced, as that our views and propenſities may differ, as much perhaps as our faces; no two of which, throughout the human race, and through numerous ages, are found to be alike: and amidſt this infinite variety

variety, the erring nature of man may diverge into error, and degrees of error, continually different.

But as it may be ſaid of all, "we are fear-"fully and wonderfully made," ſo are we all, more or leſs, partakers of the infinite void and chaos of darkneſs, from which nothing ſhort of that creating power that once ſaid, "Let "there be light, and there was light," can deliver us.

Thus circumſtanced, in the habitation of infinite ſpace, to what inferior, or other power, for illumination and deliverance, ſhall we have recourſe? We are formed for the painful, indeed, but ſtill bleſſed capacity, of wiſhing for light, for more certainty and ſatisfaction. But to what other power ſhall we direct our wiſhes, and addreſs the ardency of our prayers?

Is there any other power in Heaven or on earth? No. But how ſhall we approach a power that is *inviſible*, and addreſs it in a ſuitable manner? This is a queſtion which in ſome ſtates of mind may be the moſt difficult

and diſtreſsful. The ſource of all power, and of all the ſenſible light of which we can have any idea, is indeed inviſible; and ſuch a ſource muſt be the object of our FAITH.

We muſt "walk by faith, and not by ſight." But ever to be acknowledged with thankſgiving is this truth, that there is a communication of evidence by means of a general conſciouſneſs, in the humble and ſuppliant mind, that GOD *is preſent with us, judging or approving all we do, and all we think.* Senſible as we muſt often painfully be, of the natural darkneſs, and fearfulneſs of our ſituation—yet ſenſible alſo, in no leſs degree, are mankind made, that they have the power of ſecret acceſs to that eternally preſent Being, who, before man was ſenſible that worlds were made, or ever the voice of thankſgiving and praiſe was heard in heaven, was in the eternal ſtillneſs, and filled all in all.

In the ſtillneſs of the mind, in the abſence of tempeſtuous paſſions, men are ſpoken to in the language of the divine attributes—they are *enlightened* by the energy of the creating fiat—they are inſtructed in the firſt principles of the oracles

oracles of GOD. All are made to hear, according to their capacities for happineſs or miſery. But, though "all have heard, all "have not obeyed;" and this is the condemnation, "Though light is thus come into the "world, men reject it—they love darkneſs "rather than light.

But the language of the ancient and new goſpel of GOD is, "ſhew to *Jacob* his tranſ-"greſſions, and to the houſe of Iſrael their ſin." We are admoniſhed as tranſgreſſors, and as ſinners; but not as thoſe who are to be caſt off, and conſigned to the miſery of that eternal darkneſs, which nature has her taſte of, even in this world.

We are called to the work of mental ſupplication, and that ſtedfaſt availing *deſire* of the ſoul, which ſhall bring us into a comfortable ſenſe of the preſence of a being, all-powerful, all-wiſe, all-beneficent, all-glorious, and all-good!

Our conſolation and encouragement are, that we are able to employ this *deſire*, availably in all

all ſituations, however afflictive—and independently of all the paſſions and infirmities of one another.

It is therefore the greateſt wiſdom of man, in this ſtate of being, to uſe this ineſtimable privilege of his nature with conſtancy, and a fervent mind; as nothing elſe can be ſo much his reaſonable duty, and nothing elſe can avail him under the prevalence of all the ſpiritual darkneſs which he is ſo often led to deplore.

And as we muſt be beyond a doubt convinced of the infinite attributes of the Being who made us, and who ſaid, "Let there be "light, and there was light;" the doctrines of his goſpel inſtruct us to believe, that through the earneſt prayer of our minds, and the dedication of our affections to him, his infinite goodneſs *will* effect for us, in ſuch a diſpoſition, all that good which his infinite power can accompliſh.

He who hath marvellouſly made us capable of perceiving that outward light, which was the effect of his creating word, and called us to contemplate

contemplate thereby the wonders of his power —ſeeing we are alſo called of him to another ſtate of exiſtence, and to a citizenſhip in a city "which needeth not the light of the ſun, or of "the moon, or of the ſtars;" and furthermore, that we are called, while here, to a *preparation* for that inheritance; let us ſtedfaſtly believe in the call, and accordingly pray, that by the energy of the ſame omnific word, he would create within us a manifeſtation of that celeſtial light—the light which is the effect of the love of his own heavenly kingdom; and under the direction of his unerring wiſdom, this light will ſhine.

III.

And GOD *ſaw the light, that it was good.*

Gen. i. 4.

FORMED as we are with capacities to diſtinguiſh between things that differ, and not only to yield our mental *aſſent* to the fitneſs and excellence of moral truths, but our *admiration* of outward and intellectual beauty; how can we ſufficiently employ our thoughts on thoſe objects

objects of beauty, to which infinite wiſdom hath called us?

It is not only poſſible for poor benighted and inattentive men to "paſs the time of their ſo-"journing here," in a kind of ſtupid apathy, regardleſs of the glory that is ſhed around them, by means of the light of the ſun; but obſervation may convince us that ſuch actually ſeems to be the caſe, with far the greater part of the multitude. The beautiful variety of form and colour, exhibited in the clouds of heaven, and the numberleſs plants and flowers wherewith the face of the earth is clothed, are ſo many means to engage our attention to the power and glory of that Being, who formed them all!

It is not for us to underſtand the *uſes*, in the great order of nature, for which theſe amazing varieties were ordained. And there may be infinite and relative beauties, utterly hidden from the imperfection of our viſion. They may all have their appointments and ends, with reſpect to each other, and the whole harmony of creation; ends which are infinitely beyond our conception; and ſuch they undoubtedly have.

They are a part of that univerſal order and beauty, which eternally exiſted in the divine mind, beyond the conception of the higheſt orders of intelligent creatures!

But we, inſignificant as we are, are nevertheleſs made capable of diſcerning ſo much of it as ſhould excite our continual reverence: and if we are regardleſs, as we paſs along, of thoſe helps to devotion, we do all we can to make ourſelves equally ſtupid with the beaſts of the field, which uſe the light of the ſun for no better purpoſe than to crop the beauty of that field, for their ſuſtenance, without reflection.

But as we are thus particularly admoniſhed by the example of the great Creator himſelf, to notice and diſtinguiſh goodneſs in the light and glory of his works, how ſhall we dare be forgetful of our duty, in reverently regarding that light, and that glory, which for our ſakes he hath ſo emphatically pronounced *good?* And the more ſo when we have ſuch abundant cauſe to believe, that the manifeſtation of outward light, glorious as it is, is but a ſhadowy reſemblance

blance of that intellectual and heavenly light, which in the infinite mercy of GOD is yet more largely to be revealed!

IV.

And on the ſeventh day GOD *ended his work, which he had made: and he reſted on the ſeventh day from all his work which he had made.* Gen. ii. 2.

No part of Holy Scripture may be ſaid to require ſo great caution and diſtinction in the human mind, as thoſe paſſages wherein the operations and affections of the Supreme Majeſty are ſpoken of, in conformity to our feeble powers of conception.

And though ſuch relations are given in condeſcenſion to our weakneſs, while in the body, nothing ſurely ſhould conduce more to the conſtant humility of our minds, than thoughts of the neceſſity that there ſeems to have been, for an appearance of *degradation*, even of the unalterable majeſty of GOD, in order that we might have any ſenſible conception at all of him.

For

For it cannot but be, that with all our moſt reverent caution, and with all our endeavours only to conceive of him as the ſupreme and glorious Creator, we muſt fall infinitely ſhort of a juſt conception of *what he is*.

With reſpect to the marvellous ſubject of creation, though we are led to the ideas of a gradual operation of his infinite power, through a work of ſix days, yet ſhould we ever bear in mind that this gradual work can only be a ſeries ſubſiſting in the weakneſs of *our* intellect; for with reſpect to him, with whom one day is as a thouſand years, and a thouſand years as one day, there could be no diviſion of days, nor any ſenſible ſeries of volition.

The creation, therefore, may have been an *eternal exiſtence*, as all other realities may be, *eternal exiſtences*, in the divine mind; or, co-eternal with that undivided, perfect knowledge, which muſt have been co-eternal with GOD. And the ſubjects of ſuch a knowledge muſt have reſted, or exiſted, in the unity of GOD's eternal power!

Our

Our ideas may perhaps be a little, though very imperfectly, helped, by ſuppoſing that the firſt *man* muſt have included all the eſſences and properties of the innumerable millions of beings, of the ſame order, which have ſeemed to ſpring, or which ſhall ever ſeem to ſpring from him.

The original ſeed of every plant, or every original combination of matter, "whoſe ſeed "is in itſelf," muſt have contained, in itſelf, the eſſence of all ſucceeding manifeſtations of ſuch bodies; ſo that all the modifications of the innumerable myriads of exiſtences—both of thoſe we call animate and inanimate—through all the ſeemingly ſolid and fluid elements—throughout infinite ſpace, and through all duration, we may conclude to have ſomehow exiſted—perhaps we may ſay *ſpiritually* exiſted, in their eſſences, from all eternity, in the infinite mind!

The account then, which is above quoted, of the ſucceſſive labours of GOD, and of his *reſting* on the Seventh Day, can be only an account ſimply adapted to the created imper-

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fect ſtate of our perception and conſciouſneſs; and to anſwer ſome *unrevealed* ends of infinite wiſdom concerning us: perhaps, that in this infirm ſtate of being, we might have ſomething like ſtages of reſt for our imagination, in contemplating the incomprehenſible theme! and might be brought, in our ideas, by *periods of relief*, to a *Sabbath*, or ultimate *reſt*; in which we may pauſe, and ponder within us, the created wonders, and the wonders of created *good*.

When GOD had created all, it is ſaid, "he "conſidered it, and ſaw that all was *good*." Now this could not be (as poor imperfect man is prone to conſider) *literally true*, with reſpect to a being in whom the fullneſs of all good, and all the poſſibilities of good, were eternally inherent. *He* could have no *doubts*, and conſequently no motive to *conſider*; no *new perceptions* of good, or *new notices* of reſt.

All the gradual conſciouſneſs then, and all the new notices of *labour*, of *good*, and of *reſt*, muſt be wholly in the *perception*, and *for the uſe* of ſuch an imperfect ſentient being as *man*, whoſe happineſs is to conſiſt in "new and liv-

"ing"

"ing" notices of the infinite operations within him, and without him: which are things utterly inapplicable to a being of eternal and immutable knowledge, and of infinite perfections!

V.

Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace. Pſa. xxxvii. 37.

FOR what good purpoſe are we injoined to do that which we cannot do? or how ſhall we mark the *perfect* man, when we do not know where to find him?

Theſe are difficulties which naturally occur to the weakneſs of the human mind. And no wonder that ſuch ſhould be the caſe, when every ſerious man is ſo accuſtomed to convictions of his own errors, and the general imperfection of his fellow-beings, that he not only looks in vain for a character equal to his own poor ideas of a *perfect man*; but is perhaps convinced, from the imperfection which he feels within himſelf, and which he finds attending him through the buſineſs of the world, even as it were, up to the altar of his GOD; that though he

he ſhould live to the age of Methuſalem, *perfection* muſt ſtill appear to be a ſtate far diſtant.

But it is the prerogative of the Almighty to manifeſt his pleaſure concerning us in his own terms: and he who knows our frame, beſt knows in what terms we can moſt advantageouſly receive it.

Therefore it undoubtedly was, that Abraham was addreſſed in this awful manner, *Gen.* xvii. 1. *I am the Almighty* GOD, *walk before me, and be thou perfect.* And our Bleſſed SAVIOUR injoined the multitude in his ſermon on the Mount, *Matth.* v. 48. *Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

The dignity and perfection of the divine Legiſlator, who could not give us a law that he will leave us unable to fulfil, at leaſt in a manner acceptable to that mercy which covers his judgment-ſeat; the encouragement we have to truſt in Him, who by his ſpirit helpeth our infirmities; and the promiſes of inconceivable bleſſings annexed to our penitent ſenſe of tranſgreſſion, and endeavours of amendment—

ſhould operate as ſo many motives of admiration, and thankfulneſs to GOD, for the ſtrictneſs and purity of his laws: more eſpecially as we may encouragingly infer, that ineffably glorious, indeed, muſt that ſtate be, which we are called to prepare for, in another world, when to ſuch poor impotent beings as we are, the conditions of admiſſion propoſed are ſo refining and ſublime!

And notwithſtanding the difficulty of a literal compliance with the precept of the text, "Mark the perfect man;" yet as we are capacitated to mark a difference between good and evil—we may mark a difference in the paſſions and habits of men, and their ſeveral tendencies towards making them uniformly calm and happy, or generally troubled and miſerable.

Nothing, in the human character, ſtrikes us ſo forcibly as the happy tendency of a *loving* diſpoſition: it is the prevalence of *pure love* in the heart—the offspring of the divine good-will—and the ſubſtance of the goſpel of CHRIST, that preſerves poor erring mortals from every treſpaſs,

treſpaſs, and delivers from every evil, which tempted human nature eſcapes.

The goodneſs of GOD, through JESUS CHRIST, opens this love as a fountain in the heart—wherein Judah and Jeruſalem may cleanſe their polluted affections, till they come to the experience of living in the element of love—the perfection of which is the higheſt perfection of their nature and happineſs.

Such a perfection, indeed, may be impoſſible to take place on this ſide the angelic world, wherein the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect are to be unclothed of the infirmities of the body; but ſuch is the divine goodneſs to us, that we have reaſon to truſt, that the man, in this ſtate of being, whoſe governing principle is *love*, is the man pronounced, for human eſtimation, "*the perfect man.*"

Notwithſtanding ſome weakneſſes which flow not from the perverſeneſs of his will, he may be perfect, through the full predominance of his *love*. The man who dwelleth in love dwelleth in GOD, who is perfect; the mark of

GOD's peaceable ſpirit is upon him, and *the end of that man is peace.*

VI.

Knowing the terrors of the LORD, *we perſuade men.* 2 Cor. v. 11.

THE general motives on which the Holy Scriptures exhort men to a religious life, are twofold, viz. *love* and *fear*. It hath been ſometimes a matter of doubt, among teachers and ſerious men, which of the two motives is the moſt powerfully adapted to excite a profitable ſerioufneſs in the human mind, ever prone as it is to deviate from the path of rectitude, and to diſregard its own great intereſt for time and for eternity.

To be wiſely informed in ſuch an important point, and thereby to become ſkilful in rightly dividing the word of truth, muſt be an attainment of the firſt importance in the great buſineſs of divinity.

It ſeems to be a kind of natural conſequence of zeal for the truth, and a ſtrong deſire for the

the reformation of mankind, to be earneſt and frequent in the inforcement of righteouſneſs, by "the terrors of the LORD," inſtead of regarding the apoſtle's words, "Knowing the "terror of the LORD, we *perſuade men.*"

Hence it is, that zealous preachers are moſt frequent in calling upon their auditors, to regard the denunciations of the divine vengeance, and the terror of a judgment to come. And hence perhaps it is, that a great part of thoſe, who, under ſome particular profeſſions of religious principles, are deemed religious perſons, appear to be little the more acquainted with the leavening, ſoftening nature, of real religion; and ſeem to be led to the outward altar, more from a motive of "terror" reſpecting GOD's vengeance, than from a pure and happy motive of love towards the Supreme Being, and a calm admiration of the infinite mercy and benignity of his nature.

But though the inſpired apoſtles are not ſilent, as to the "terrors of the LORD," yet is it remarkable, that in imitation of their divine maſter, they abound in the inforcement of the

doctrine of obedience, and a religious life, from the powerful and efficacious motive of *love*; which, whenever excited towards the great ſource itſelf, of that ſublime affection, is ever attended with the moſt powerful and delightful effects.

Nor is it marvellous that ſuch ſhould be the caſe, ſeeing that he himſelf is moſt emphatically declared to be *love*; and the operations of his providence are one continued manifeſtation of the moſt benign regard towards his accountable creatures.

In ſhort, the declared, and the manifeſted end of creation was, to communicate *happineſs*, by communicating *love*. And it cannot be wonderful that an acquaintance, an inward acquaintance, with that principle which firſt occaſioned the exiſtence of all created beings, ſhould be capable of raiſing men into the neareſt reſemblance of the Creator himſelf, and inſpire the moſt obvious portion of that happineſs, in which the Creator of all things is completely and eternally happy.

Rather

Rather let us remark, that wherever a dreadful apprehenſion of the *juſtice* of GOD, and a future judgment, gain an aſcendancy over the ideas of mercy and goodneſs, in the minds of poor mortal beings, they are generally moſt miſerable to themſelves and others, on account of their religion.

In caſes which fall ſhort of deſperation and inward terror, but wherein the ideas of divine wrath, and infinite juſtice, are much dwelt upon, (which is not uncommon) to the excluſion of that happy ſenſe of the divine benignity, which man is called to conſider and rejoice in, there is not only much unhappineſs felt in ſuch perſons themſelves, but they are generally ſour and cenſorious towards others.

And if theſe effects, which in themſelves will be allowed to be oppoſite to the nature of heaven, are ſeen to reſult from a forward promulgation and inforcement of "the terrors of "the LORD," by repreſenting him, whoſe likeneſs we cannot comprehend, as an inflexible and dreadful *judge*, we cannot be too careful to guard againſt expreſſions of ſuch a tendency,

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at leaſt till we are ſure that we ourſelves are the *purified* and *inſpired* inſtruments of the divine denunciations!

VII.

And Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to paſs when they were in the field, that Cain roſe up againſt Abel his brother, and ſlew him. Gen. iv. 8.

"THE Dignity of human nature!" "The "milk of human kindneſs!" Boaſted and flattering deſcriptions! But what an humiliating and fearful picture of this human nature doth the firſt part of hiſtory hold out to the ſerious and conſiderate perſon! And while we date our origin from ſuch a ſtock, how ſhall we be wiſe and prudent, without ſeriouſly laying to heart the mixture of wrath and cruelty, which we ſeem to inherit by nature, from ſuch a depraved anceſtry?

Very remarkable, and in point, are the words of Lamech, the fifth generation from poor Cain. "And Lamech ſaid unto his wives, Adah and "Zillah, hear my voice, ye wives of Lamech, "and hearken to my ſpeech, for I have ſlain a

"man unto my wounding, and a young man unto my hurt." The marginal rendering ſeems to imply a ſenſe of theſe words ſtill more to the purpoſe now before us, and rather to convey a reflection on the miſerable propenſity of his nature, than that he had actually committed murder; no ſuch actual ſin being recorded of Lamech. "*I would ſlay a man in my* "*wound, and a young man in my hurt.*" In this rendering, if it be not the full meaning of the ſpeaker (which I am inclined to think it is) there is ſomething ſo conſonant with the natural turbulence of man, that we may profitably conſider it and apply it for the purpoſe of admonition, caution, and humility, of which we ſtand in ſo much need.

In that early age, the law, from Mount Sinai, which prohibited murder, had not been delivered; but in addition to the dreadful judgment which the Almighty had pronounced upon poor unhappy Cain, there ſeems to have been infuſed into the mind an inſtinctive moral ſenſe of the great duty of righteouſneſs and brotherly kindneſs, and the dreadful deſert of judgment upon the wrathful nature of the depraved

praved human race; a race which had loſt its firſt and only dignity—its image of *Love*, in its created and unfallen ſtate.

It ſeems to have been given to Lamech to bewail the *wound*, and the *hurt*, of which he was ſo ſenſible, from the feeling which he had of that wicked and revengeful diſpoſition, that tranſgreſſion and ſin had brought into the world, and into ſuch ſtrength in the human will. Perhaps it may not be unprofitable to human pride, if we compare the different ſtates of human nature, before and after tranſgreſſion, to the different degrees of ferocity, attributed to beaſts of prey, before and after their taſting of blood.

Such a compariſon may not be liked by ſome, who would willingly take a kind of refuge in the fancied dignity, and ſuppoſed perfection, of their nature.

But Lamech had evidently different feelings. And we may well ſuppoſe, that in the midſt of domeſtick and conjugal intercourſe, which of all kinds of intercourſe may be deemed the moſt

moſt allowable and innocent, he was ſo affected with a diſpoſition which he felt within himſelf, at a time when the head of a family was the uncontrouled executive power in ſociety, that he framed this little ſong of lamentation over the cruelty of human nature, for the religious inſtruction of his family. "Hear my voice, ye "wives of Lamech, and hearken to my ſpeech, "for I would (even) ſlay a man in my wound, "and a young man in my hurt!"

The formal and ſolemn giving of the law, againſt all wickedneſs of the human heart, at the eſtabliſhment of the people of Iſrael, and the ſucceeding bodies of laws, formed for the ſecurity of man, againſt that dreadful creature man, together with the bleſſed diſplay of goſpel righteouſneſs through JESUS CHRIST, have brought down to theſe days, a moſt abundant proviſion againſt human malignity. But human nature, as nature, ſeems to remain much the ſame.

Evil propenſity and cruelty vary in complexion and degree, among the diverſified multitude of the human ſpecies, in every age of the

the world: but the dangerous leaven of malice, and of iniquity, pervades the whole.

Little children ſhew it forth, by the ſtrength of their mother's milk: and were it not for the multiplicity of reſtraint, which is provided for their correction and government, from the firſt dawn of reflection to their lateſt breath, we have no reaſon to think that human nature, now, would generally be found leſs murderous than in Cain, or in Lamech.

But every age hath had abundant cauſe to contraſt, with thankfulneſs, the purity of the revealed will of GOD, and the power of obedience derived from that will, with the miſery attendant on the gratification of the various luſts of the fleſh and of the eye, and all the pride of life.

And ſurely *we*, of the preſent age, can never ſufficiently adore that Being, who hath not only provided ſuch abundant reſtraints upon us, to prevent our diſobedience and further fall; but hath annexed ſuch powerful motives to obedience, humility, and love, as are proclaimed

claimed and promiſed in the goſpel, for time and for all eternity!

VIII.

And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years, and he died. Gen. v. 5.

ONE remarkable circumſtance attending the inhabitants of the antediluvian world was, their *longevity*. Thus it appears that our firſt parent, though not the oldeſt of the human race, lived more than ten times the number of days which now commonly fall to the lot of men, who are ſuppoſed to attain to old age.

Such a revolution in the order of nature, was according to the hidden wiſdom of the governor of the world; and it is no part of our neceſſary buſineſs to enquire the cauſe of it, or attempt to aſcertain, as ſome curious ſpeculators on the ſubject have done, the means (if within the reach of human reaſon there were ſuch) whereby men might now lengthen out their days to a like period.

The

The great, and all-important truth, which revelation hath communicated to us, that *man is an immortal being, deſigned for a future eternal exiſtence*, is a ſubject of infinitely greater conſequence. And the ſublimity of the doctrine of that eternal exiſtence, being connected with eternal happineſs, is a theme, which while it calls aloud for the greateſt poſſible thankfulneſs, ſhould preclude every murmuring thought about the fewneſs of our days in this world.

The hardſhip of the *ſhortneſs* of life ſeems to have ſometimes affected the human mind, before the introduction of the goſpel. We find ſomething like it in the language of good old Jacob, in his anſwer to Pharoah, reſpecting the length of his life: "Few and evil have the "days of the years of my life been." And in Job, "Man that is born of a woman, is but "of few days, and full of trouble: he cometh "forth as a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth "alſo, as a ſhadow, and continueth not."

But the doctrines of the goſpel ſhould rather excite our gratitude to our heavenly Father, that it hath ſtood conſiſtent with his wiſdom,

to

to ſhorten the term of our probation and pain here, and appoint the ſpeedier means of our tranſlation into a ſtate of unmixed felicity hereafter. If we are to "rejoice evermore, and "in every thing give thanks," ſurely this privilege ſhould be conſidered as claiming our rejoicing and thankſgiving, in a moſt emphatical manner!

We have no reaſon to conclude, that the days before the flood were in themſelves more happy than ours, which are appointed to ſo much more early a termination. And if this be the caſe, we muſt thankfully allow, that the advantage in our favour is proportionably great. Upon which principle it behoves us to ſet the higheſt value on our appointed *privilege*, of more early dying, as to the body, and (as a promiſed reward for our reſignation and "pati-"ent continuance in well-doing") to be with CHRIST, in his more ſpiritual and glorious kingdom, which is far better.

It hath, indeed, pleaſed the wiſe author of nature, to implant in the human mind a general deſire of life, which is undoubtedly neceſ-

ſary,

ſary, in order to the giving us a general motive to take ſuch care of our perſons, as may be the beſt ſecurity of the general harmony and ſubſiſtence of ſociety—for without ſuch a common ſtimulus, we ſhould become regardleſs, both of ourſelves and one another.

But if the duration of human life be ſhortened, the goſpel revelation hath added a ſupernatural and moſt engaging motive, beyond what ſeems to have been held forth to the old world, (or even particularly in the patriarchal times) to a right uſe of thoſe days which *are* allotted us, viz. *immortality*, and *eternal life, beyond the grave!*

Thus doth a ſerious conſideration of holy ſcripture doctrines, beyond all others in the world, furniſh us with motives to preſent thankfulneſs, tranquility, and joy! Happy is it for all, who acquire ſuch means of balancing in their minds, the pains and ſolicitude of a bodily exiſtence, ſhort as it now is, by truths ſo ſublime, and convictions ſo divine in themſelves!

IX. *Then*

IX.

Then there aroſe a reaſoning among them, which of them ſhould be the greateſt. Luke ix. 46.

COULD it be, that ſuch a reaſoning ſhould ariſe among the very diſciples of the meek and lowly JESUS? And even while they were in his preſence! "What further need have we of "witneſſes," to the deceitfulneſs and treachery of the human heart? What further need have we of a ſufficient reaſon for the obſcurity of birth, the lowly appearance, and the remarkable humility of our Bleſſed SAVIOUR? And how otherwiſe ſhould he have been the pattern of conduct, and the real Saviour of all them that believe?

The time and the manner of this reaſoning, among the poor inattentive diſciples and followers of JESUS, are both remarkable, and fraught with inſtruction.

Our Bleſſed SAVIOUR had juſt been working a miracle, by healing a lunatick perſon, and caſting out an unclean ſpirit. A work which

the diſciples had been intreated to do, but through their weakneſs, were utterly unable to effect. They had all juſt been "amazed with "the mighty power of GOD." And it ſhould ſeem reaſonable, in the view of a ſerious mind, that on ſuch an occaſion they muſt have been particularly penetrated, by a conviction of their impotence, and unimportance, in a compariſon of themſelves with their divine maſter.

It ſhould ſeem, that if ever there was a time, more meet than another, for humble and abaſing thoughts of themſelves, it was then. More eſpecially as they had juſt had an additional proof of their *littleneſs*, in their incapacity for underſtanding the ſublime inſtructions of their heavenly teacher, who had taken occaſion to admoniſh them to a conſideration of his doctrines. "Let theſe ſayings ſink down "into your ears, for the Son of man ſhall be "delivered into the hands of men."

"But they underſtood not the meaning of "his words, and feared to aſk him." Yet, in the midſt of this uncertainty, and this remarkable proof of their *littleneſs*, which perhaps is no

no where recorded in a ſtronger light, "there "aroſe a reaſoning among them, which of "them ſhould be the greateſt!"

What a ſtriking and marvellous mode of inſtructing them, in true greatneſs and wiſdom, did the holy JESUS chooſe! How completely did he level his doctrines at the pride and ambition of the human heart!

He firſt permitted his own choſen diſciples to make themſelves examples of ſuch a miſerable ambition, that the ſucceeding generations of his profeſſed Church might be admoniſhed to fear it, and maintain a profitable jealouſy over themſelves.

Then he taught them, as never man taught, what the chriſtian diſtinction is, and what that greatneſs is to be, which ſhall endure for ever. "Perceiving the thoughts of their "heart, he took a child, and ſet him by him." Striking emblem of that innocence, and lowlineſs, which ſhould beſt become and adorn his followers!

Pride and greatneſs had long been the unhappineſs and the idol of the world, and had occaſioned all the forgetfulneſs of GOD, and all that ſhame and diſorder which he beheld in Jeruſalem, when he wept over it! "Whoſoever," ſaid he, "receiveth this child in my "name, receiveth me:" whoſoever receiveth into his heart the ſimplicity and innocence of a little child, receiveth the likeneſs of my kingdom. "And whoſoever ſhall receive me, "receiveth *him* that ſent me." And whoſoever receiveth me, and the likeneſs of my kingdom, which is not of this world, receiveth and doeth the will of my father which is in heaven. "For he that is *leaſt* among you all, ſhall be "*great*."

He that is leaſt after the image of this world, which lieth in pride and wickedneſs, and an evil emulation, leading to wrath and bitterneſs, (which is the *greatneſs* of the prince of darkneſs) the ſame ſhall be great in an inward happineſs—great in the experience of the love of GOD—great in the hope of eternal life!

X. *Repent*

X.

Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. Matth. iii. 2.

IN this proclamation of the appointed and holy inſpired forerunner of CHRIST, a proclamation which in ſo few words compriſeth the ſubſtance of the miſſion of an apoſtle, the ſerious and attentive reader will diſcern much exhortation, and that kind of encouragment to the *beginning* of a chriſtian life, which thouſands of volumes might fail to excite in his mind.

The voice of this apoſtle was indeed as that of a divine herald, to prepare the people of that time and place, for the more divine and efficacious miniſtry of the Son of GOD. A miniſtry which was to become the means of diffuſing the wiſdom and mercy of heaven, more eminently among the poor and miſerable inhabitants of the earth.

Thus, in a glorious ſenſe, the kingdom of heaven, or the open revelation of divine truths,

as ſubſiſting eternally in the will of the father and fountain of good, might be ſaid to be at hand.

And ſo glorious was the diſplay of the riches of eternal righteouſneſs, then about to be made, that in compariſon of it, all the revelations of patriarchal times may be ſaid to afford but a dim and feeble luſtre! To be but as the twinkling of a few wandering ſtars, to the meridian ſplendor of an unclouded ſun!

An obvious and melancholy truth it is, that notwithſtanding the continuance of this meridian light of doctrine, the nations of thoſe who forget GOD, ſeem as little ſenſible of the light of ſuch an eternal diſpenſation, as though the advantages of it had never been extended to them!

But this reflection ſhould at leaſt ſink deeply into the minds of as many as have felt the force of it, in ſuch a world of depravity as this really is. Our ſmalleſt convictions of goſpel truth, which the Almighty is cauſing to take place in our minds, are ſo many awakening notices

notices and calls, to a meek and profitable attention to the greateſt of all ſubjects!

In the ſeaſons of theſe convictions, which all rational beings are favoured with, we may hear a voice, as the voice of one crying in the wilderneſs of our hearts, and proclaiming the language of repentance, for that the kingdom of heaven is ſtill at hand.

The kingdom of heaven hath theſe attributes of GOD himſelf, that it hath neither beginning nor end, obſcurity nor change. But with reſpect to our knowledge of it, there is not only a beginning, and a firſt ſenſible feeling of its peculiar properties; but a gradual experience to be felt of its opening, diffuſion, bleſſed ſecurity, and tranſcendent peace. All this is *within* the ſoul. And the ſoul is endowed with powers to enjoy it, while "the ſtranger inter-"meddleth not with its joy."

In this evil world, what could be propoſed to our conſideration equally great and delightful? Dreadfully depraved, and fallen below itſelf, muſt that mind be, which cannot expand and

and rejoice in the repreſentation of the unbounded benefit of ſuch a privilege!

But in a real partaking of ſuch a privilege, there muſt be *a beginning*, in *repentance* and *amendment of life*. Repentance, let no human being ſuppoſe for a moment, is unneceſſary for him. We have all ſinned, and fallen ſhort of the glory of GOD.

It is the prerogative of omnipotence to know the degree of all our tranſgreſſions, and the depth of our guilt. And while we are ſure that all is *open*, and *naked*, and *bare*, before Him, we may alſo be aſſured, that the divine eſtimation is the perfection of judgment—while, as the eſſential glory of the divine attributes, mercy covers even the judgment-ſeat, and we are not beyond its infinite reach!

To repent then, is both neceſſary and wiſe. To repent with a deep and reverent purpoſe of amendment, as we regard the love of GOD, which is the reward of it, and the eſſence of the kingdom of heaven, is the greateſt wiſdom that can diſtinguiſh our choice. And ſo to gain

gain a part in that kingdom, the greateſt bleſſedneſs, and the moſt exalted dignity!

XI.

——*Nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of* CHRIST *and of* GOD. Epheſ. v. 5.

IT may be difficult to find in the whole Bible a declaration more poſitive and alarming than this againſt the covetous man. It is alſo a character to which the conſent of the multitude hath affixed a general odium.

But popular clamour, it is true, any more than popular praiſe, is not always to be regarded as the teſt of truth. The motives to cenſure, as well as approbation, among the bulk of mankind, are frequently weak, founded in paſſion rather than wiſdom, and therefore we may reaſonably hope, that in many inſtances the final allotment of our fellow-beings may, through the wiſdom and goodneſs of the great governor of the world, be more happy than human judgment would have it.

And

And it is more than probable, that a covetous diſpoſition in one man may be magnified and cenſured by another, whoſe heart may be greatly hardened and corrupted by other paſſions, if not by the very paſſion of covetouſneſs itſelf; ſo excellent is the precept of our Bleſſed SAVIOUR, againſt a forward cenſorioufneſs: "Firſt caſt the beam out of thine own eye, and "then ſhalt thou ſee more clearly to caſt out "the mote that is in thy brother's eye."

But this precept, while it ſhould make us ever apprehenſive about our own infirmities and errors, and ever tender of forming a haſty judgment on other men, will not excuſe the ſin of *covetouſneſs* in the ſight of GOD, any more than it can change that which is the proper quality of one thing, into the diſtinct and proper quality of another.

Covetouſneſs is a ſin the moſt corrupting and baneful that can pervade the heart. It tends to increaſe, inſtead of leſſening, the miſery of human life—brings the ſoul into the greateſt oppoſition to the benignity of the divine nature, and diſqualifies for that chriſtian

ſociety

ſociety which ſtandeth, both in heaven and on earth, in tenderneſs of affection, a will to "do "good, and communicate, for with ſuch ſacri-"fices GOD is well pleaſed."

It is not eaſy to fix the ſtandard of generoſity, or ſhew by written precepts or rules where proper induſtry and œconomy may end, and covetouſneſs begin. But it is to be remembered, that this ſin, as well as many others, againſt which we are warned in the moſt earneſt manner, will not be judged, in the day of final account, by any common maxims of men, either found written in books, or held in common eſteem.

We are to be determined in our conduct by another rule, and a law of more ſacred obligation, which no reaſonable and accountable being is without, in the conſciouſneſs of his own mind. In this matter the ancient declaration remains in all its force: "It is ſhewn "unto thee, O man, what is good, and what "doth the LORD thy GOD require of thee, but "to do juſtly, love mercy, and walk humbly "with thy GOD."

Now

Now it is divinely declared, that "it is more "bleſſed to give than to receive:" therefore the giving, and communicative diſpoſition, is more acceptable in the divine eſtimation, than the deſire of receiving, wherever the object is reſtricted, as in the matter before us it is, to outward and temporal things.

It becomes then a duty connected with the divine bleſſedneſs—with our own preſent happineſs—and the general good of ſociety, to be ever ſtudious of the *meaſure*, in which every man ſhould be found rightly generous; which is, to be found *merciful* by the ſupreme omniſcient judge.

Covetouſneſs may have ſmall, and almoſt imperceptible beginnings, and may be one of the moſt liable of all the paſſions, to wear, in its infancy, as well as progreſs, a falſe name: the name of *prudence*, the title of *provident œconomy*, are moſt natural and eaſy qualifications of its deformity.

But prudence and œconomy generally *remain* the names for the moſt confirmed covetouſneſs,

neſs, till death itſelf break up the diſguiſe; not indeed, to the amazement of *others*, (for better men behold and lament the depravity of the paſſion) but to the amazement, ſhame, and diſtreſs, of the covetous perſon himſelf!

Shame and miſery in death, muſt be the concluſion of ſuch a life, if the awful doctrines of a final judgment, and a righteous retribution, be not falſe: yea, if but the doctrine of being rewarded with all the happineſs which men are prepared to receive, be true.

The preſent ſtate of being is largely declared to be a ſtate of probation—a ſtate in which the ſoul is to acquire, by the purity and benevolence of its affections, and the refined ſtrength of its deſires, a fitneſs for the very regions themſelves of purity, benevolence, and God-like affection.

The man, therefore, whoſe days ſhall have been ſpent in the predominance of deſire after accumulation—exacting the utmoſt farthing, perhaps, from laborious indigence—withholding ſuccour from affliction—graſping at thouſands

ſands more than his needs require—or relieving with a ſcanty and ineffectual hand, the various miſeries of thoſe who paſſed mourning and languiſhing before him!

Such a perſon muſt be an unfit inhabitant for ſuch a place—can have no part or inheritance in ſuch a kingdom, becauſe he has no preparations of affection for the enjoyment of it. As he poſſeſſed not on earth any reſemblance of the divine love, and the unmixed charity of heaven, he can *acquire* none of theſe merely by paſſing through the agonies of death; and conſequently muſt appear, in the world of good ſpirits, the ſame ſordid and miſerable being, as when wallowing in his covetouſneſs among men; or if there be a difference, it muſt be ſo much the more againſt him, by how much the more conſpicuouſly his ſtate differs from the exalted love and benevolence of angels!

This is not only true with regard to the ultimate ſtate, into which the ſoul is preparing to enter, when it ſhall be unclothed at once of its body, and all the falſehood and diſguiſe of its

its covetouſneſs; but all its affections here on earth are ſo contaminated with ſelfiſhneſs, and the whole ſoul ſo darkened from the perception of divine good, (which is univerſal ſympathy and kindneſs) that it can have no part in that liberality, that diffuſion of divine charity and love, which is the ſenſible kingdom of CHRIST in *this* world.

Such a ſoul has *its* ſuperior good, in the poſſeſſion of temporal things, and the hoarding up of the periſhable things of a periſhable world, in preference to divine treaſures; but this ſuperior good it holds in open defiance of the ſupreme authority of Him, who, cloathing the lilies, and feeding the ravens, with their proper food and ornament, by conſtant returns of fruitful ſeaſons and good upon the earth, is calling men to a dependance on the ſufficiency of his providence—which, having ſupplied, can ever ſupply, with all needful things.

Love is the continual riches of GOD's kingdom: loving-kindneſs the very *element* of the *exiſtence* of the divine power; and therefore it can never fail!

It

It was not without the deſign of inforcing doctrine by example, that the holy JESUS reſided amongſt men, poor and dependant, the LORD of all.

It was not without a great purpoſe of inſtruction, that the divine apoſtles laboured for their ſupport, as much as was conſiſtent with the duty of their miſſion; that they dwelt in poverty; and, having food and raiment, learned to be therewith content. It was not without teaching that they, by ſuch a courſe of following their maſter's example, not only lived the proper life of chriſtian miniſters; but conſpicuouſly letting their moderation appear unto all men, ſuſtained that part in ſociety which was conſiſtent with the general intereſt, and the loving and virtuous harmony of the whole.

They had reſpect unto a better country, *i. e.* an heavenly. They had therefore a part in what "the covetous man," who is an idolater, "whoſe idols are ſilver and gold," can have no inheritance in, "the kingdom of CHRIST and "of GOD."

It

It is not eaſy to ſpeak too forcibly, or expoſtulate with too much earneſtneſs, on the treacherous and enormous ſin of a life of covetouſneſs. It is the bane of all goodneſs in the heart of him who indulges it: and it is the ſword, famine, and peſtilence of human ſociety!

It degrades from a reaſonable nature down to paſſions below the brute—from the capacity of being ſincere, to the certainty of being an hypocrite, who ſtudies to cover over, in one diſguiſe, the ſervice of GOD and Mammon;—from the poſſibility of happineſs, to certain miſery—from the rank of being an heir of eternal life, to the certainty of a preparation for an eternal death, of all that is excellent and good!

Covetouſneſs will yet have its plea; "Good "men, in ancient time, were promiſed rewards, "and were rewarded with the riches of flocks "and of herds—with corn, wine, and oil."

But as heads of tribes, fathers of families, and governors of diſtricts, they were to be ſtore-keepers for the benefit of others; and their chief glory is recorded to have been that of liſtening

" to the poor when he cried, ſtrengthening the " hands which hung down, and confirming " the feeble knees."

Dives, in the parable, may be regarded as a monument for admonition, to thoſe who truſt in riches—are " clothed in purple and fine " linen, and fare ſumptuouſly every day," neglecting the poverty of the ſtate of Lazarus, who cried in vain for the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table.

Moreover, the goſpel of JESUS CHRIST propoſes, as the ſupreme good of our nature, the attainment and the love of far other riches —the riches of the joy of GOD's ſalvation from all wickedneſs in this world—and, as the conſummation of all poſſible good, the riches of the ſaints inheritance in the world to come; and while we would gain the great benefits and diſtinctions of our diſtinguiſhing privileges, we are to remember that theſe are the boaſted days of the goſpel of JESUS.

Joſeph of Arimathea was indeed a rich man; but we have no evidence—we have no reaſonable cauſe to believe, that his riches were the

fruit of covetouſneſs; for he was "an honour-"able counſellor," and a diſciple of a meek and lowly maſter. And we may well conclude that the affections of a moſt exalted benevolence were found in one, who was ſo diſtinguiſhed a lover of the divine character, that he at laſt meekly attended on Pilate, and begged the dead body of JESUS!

To conclude; of all the characters which are making profeſſions of chriſtianity, and (under forms and modes of devotion) a peculiar and rigid profeſſion of a meritorious ſanctity, the *covetous man* is the moſt *idolatrous*, and fartheſt from an inheritance in the kingdom of CHRIST and of GOD!

XII.

And Jacob ſaid, Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy ſight, then receive my preſent at my hand: for therefore I have ſeen thy face, as though I had ſeen the face of God, and thou waſt pleaſed with me. Gen. xxxiii. 10.

THE character of the patriarch Jacob, like every other human character, in ſacred and

prophane hiſtory, hath been by ſome conſidered as imperfect, particularly with regard to his conduct in his treatment of his brother Eſau, and the flocks and herds of his father Laban.

The account itſelf, indeed, hath been conſidered as *untrue* in theſe particulars, becauſe tending to reflect on the truth and goodneſs of GOD, by annexing his approbation or bleſſing to ſuch means.

It is however remarkable, that ſuch doubtful opinions generally proceed more from free and ſuperficial thinkers on divine ſubjects, than from men of piety and ſerious reflection, acquainted with the original language of the ſacred ſtory, and real ſtudents in the ſchool of knowledge.

Such free-thinkers are generally more expert in attempting to diſcover imperfection and diſſonance, than in conſidering the wonderful order of the divine œconomy, in the connexion, ſubſerviency, and government of events, among frail and erroneous beings. There is

no

no human character, however fair, in which there will not be found ſome imperfection—ſome circumſtances always to be repented of, and remembered, as inducements to humble reflection and amendment of life.

The effects of that imperfection may have ſome uſe in the great ſyſtem, which human beings cannot comprehend; but which, nevertheleſs, may have their important part in the ſyſtem, and furniſh apparent examples of that truth, by which good may be ſaid to flow out of evil.

Innumerable examples of this kind will be found to baffle the wiſdom of ſpeculative men, while under that moral ſenſe of good which the Governor of the world is cauſing to take place in the mind of man.

There is no *licence* afforded at the time of action, for our chuſing evil in preference to good, in any circumſtance of human agency: therefore the attributes of that infinite Being, from whom we derive our powers of perception and conſciouſneſs, muſt ſtand for ever unim-

peachable, and infinitely ſacred! And it can be no reflection on infinite goodneſs, that after evil has taken place in the words or deeds of men, he ſhould guard the happineſs of helpleſs beings from being continually affected by it.

That the Supreme Being ſhould permit circumſtances of apparent proſperity to attend the intereſted devices and deception of men—devices which ſtand in direct oppoſition to the ſimplicity of heavenly truth, is perhaps no more to be wondered at, in an inſtance recorded in Sacred Writ, than in thoſe numerous inſtances which we muſt obſerve in the world around us.

The ſcripture is continually verified: "I have "ſeen the wicked in great power, and ſpreading "himſelf like a green bay tree." But as there is no real felicity attendant on *unrighteouſneſs*; ſo we have no cauſe of envy when we behold outward proſperity for a ſeaſon annexed to it.

"I have ſeen the fooliſh (or wicked) taking "root; but ſuddenly I curſed his habitation," ſaid David. And to a ſerious attentive obſerver of men and things, the cauſe of ſuch a ſtrong expreſſion

expreſſion will, after all, be ſufficiently obvious. So much may be taken into our conſideration, by way of palliating thoſe objections which have ſometimes been irreverently raiſed againſt the wiſe, moral government of the Supreme Being.

But we muſt not ſtop at a mere negative conviction about the uniformity of his diſapprobation of falſehood—we muſt come to the poſitive and more intereſting ſide of the queſtion—we muſt conſider Him as a being of infinite mercy, as well as infinite power: And that though a man ſhould, in one or more inſtances, be guilty of the groſſeſt iniquity, that can deform his character, yet may he become a ſincere penitent; and then he becomes, as to that iniquity, a ſubject of pardon and bleſſedneſs.

By this laſt expreſſion we are not to underſtand that ſuch a being, by ſuch a change, becomes the object of outward proſperity, ſince that, as was ſhewn before, is no poſitive proof of *bleſſedneſs*.

It is ſufficient, and a moſt glorious truth, that *every* degree of penitence is under the notice,

tice, and will have the benign regard of the Almighty: and that though the morning of human life may be marked with diſcord and impiety, that morning may be ſucceeded by the meridian luſtre of a virtuous mind, which, upon the eſtabliſhed plan of the divine forgiveneſs, may cancel every guilt, and be followed with an evening tranquility, in the happy approbation of heaven.

This teaching, as we go along (admitting we were warranted to conſider the beginning of the life of Jacob as marked with that inſincerity from which we may alſo ſuppoſe Eſau not exempt) may prepare us for admiring the amiableneſs of the more refined qualities of the human heart; and for a ſuitable and more beneficial admiration of forgiveneſs, reconciliation, and peace.

The inſtance before us, of ſuch an amiable meeting of the two ſons of Iſaac, after a long ſeparation, and a mutual return of affection, is full of inſtruction, and example for imitation.

The

The expreſſion of Jacob alſo, in that dignified ſimplicity, peculiar to the firſt language of the Eaſt, may well be conſidered as heightening the picture for our advantageous contemplation: "I have ſeen thy face, as though I had "ſeen the face of GOD, and thou waſt pleaſed "with me."

From ſuch a leſſon of inſtruction we never can derive too ſtrong a reliſh of the beauty of thoſe affections, which have their origin in heaven—their reſemblance in the placability of the divine nature—or in other words, the "face "of GOD." Such leſſons, effectually, *i. e.* experimentally learned, have alone the happy tendency of harmonizing, and ornamenting, human ſociety.

We have no need to ſtudy, or look far abroad for inſtances of imperfection and evil, by which to exerciſe our powers of contraſting deformity with beauty, and malignity with the graces of love. The ſtate of nature in which we ſtand, is ſufficiently fruitful of evil deſires, and various kinds of weakneſs and wickedneſs,

to

to employ all our powers of overcoming, and returning from a worſe to a better ſtate.

Every man, independant of ſchools and philoſophy—I had almoſt ſaid, (in condeſcenſion to pleaders for the teſt of natural conſcience) independant of revelation itſelf—muſt be ſenſible of this. And if we would have any right pretenſions to wiſdom, we may be ſure we can never more ſuitably employ our time, than in continued and moſt earneſt endeavours to reduce the doctrine to practice.

Conviction may be the work of a moment: an enlargement of it may be the work of an hour; but that amiable forgiveneſs and benevolence, which diſtantly reſemble the "face of "GOD," may be the privileged and happy work of our whole lives.

Upon every occaſion, and in every inſtance of the conception of anger and diſreſpect, either in ourſelves or others, with whom we have to do, we have a new and important call to ſelf-examination, conſideration, fear of ourſelves, and endeavours after an inward victory.

This

This kind of victory was well ſpoken of in the ſchools of ancient philoſophy, thus: "The "greateſt victory that a man can gain, is the "victory over himſelf."

Human nature in the depravity of its will, hath been the ſame in all recorded ages. And though inſtances have been too rare, of that nature being ſubdued by voluntary diſcipline, and brought under ſubjection to the laws of heaven; yet every inſtance that is recorded of ſuch a conqueſt, is confeſſedly an ornament to the page of hiſtory; and we ever contemplate the character in whom it was found, with ſome degree of veneration and love.

But we may be ſure of this, that, amiable as ſuch a circumſtance is in itſelf, and pleaſantly as our minds are affected by it, the ſenſations of the reader muſt fall far ſhort of thoſe happy and glowing ſenſations, which the party whoſe qualities we admire muſt inwardly have felt on every ſuch occaſion: ſo true is the import of that moral maxim, that "virtue brings its "own reward:" ſo divinely true is that goſpel declaration, that "godlineſs is profitable "unto

"unto all things, having the promiſe of the "life that now is, and alſo of that which is to "come."

We may not heſitate to pronounce, that the amiable qualities of forgiveneſs, and the ſtrong deſire of reconciliation, on the ground of virtuous affection, are of the firſt importance in every good mind, and eſſential to the being of godlineſs. It is an infuſion of ſweetneſs into the mind, which proceeds out of the very nature of GOD himſelf; by whoſe attribute of love it is, that we exiſt, as the ſubjects of his providence; and by whoſe ſovereign benignity it is, that in the ſincerity of our cries, we are made the ſubjects of his pardon, forgiveneſs, and peace!

We never can riſe, nor can any order of created beings riſe, to a full reſemblance of his love; but we never had been made the ſubjects of a law proceeding from his all-perfect nature, but for the purpoſe of riſing to *ſome* degree of reſemblance of thoſe amiable attributes, which we are conſtrained to aſcribe unto Him.

Impreſſed

Impreſſed then, as we muſt be, from theſe conſiderations, with a ſenſe of the diſtinguiſhed privileges of our nature, it becomes, and ſupremely behoves us, to endeavour to embrace and riſe by them, into the neareſt faint reſemblance, that our frail nature can riſe to, of the Supreme Being!

The benevolent man's beſt idea of his Maker is, that of a Being every where exiſting, in the attributes of love and benignity towards his creatures: a Being who "knows our frame, "and remembers that we are but duſt;" who will not enter into ſtrict and abſolute judgment with us, for if he ſhould do that, who ſhould ſtand before him?

To forgive then one another—whoſe mutual offences, in compariſon of our manifold offences againſt the purity of heaven, are but as duſt in the balance;—to ſeek every opportunity of reconciliation, friendſhip, and love; and to love as brethren, being more and more charitable and courteous; is to effect, in the worthieſt manner we can, that reſemblance of *himſelf*, which GOD is requiring at our hands.

Then,

Then, only, ſhall we be able to enter into thoſe feelings of Jacob, when looking with new and glowing affection upon his once-injured brother; and in the tranſport of reconciliation, mutually adopt the ſubſtance of his language, "I have ſeen thy face, as though I had ſeen "the face of GOD, and thou waſt pleaſed with "me!"

XIII.

The following reflections were occaſioned by the requeſt of one of the author's moſt valued friends, to receive his ſentiments on the following quotation:——

And he went on his way rejoicing. Acts viii. 39.

IT is one great excellency of the ſacred writings, that while their whole tenor inculcates, in the moſt encouraging and ſublime manner, the laſting advantages of virtue and godlineſs; particular portions, and even members of a ſentence, like ſtars that differ from other ſtars in glory, are found to affect us, and even to enliven

enliven our contemplations, with a peculiar, and ſometimes an almoſt inſtantaneous influence.

Such effects will doubtleſs differ greatly in different minds, and in the ſame mind at different times; and it ſhall ſometimes happen that thoſe parts, which ſhall make a moſt laſting and happy impreſſion on *ſome* minds, may be read over, and repeatedly too, without any particular effect, by *other* perſons, not inferior in ſenſibility or deſires of improvement. Hence we may deduce a reaſon, of no ſmall weight, for the continuation of religious commentaries and diſcourſes, although they have doubtleſs been multiplied almoſt without number, and ſometimes with little uſe.

It is poſſible, that the paſſage above quoted may at firſt ſight ſtrike the mind of a reader, with leſs importance than it has now done the writer of theſe reflections. But if the following remarks ſhall fail of doing all the good, which good-will would impart by them, they will at leaſt have a ſerious tendency.

The

The Ethiopian eunuch, of whom, after his inſtruction by Philip, it is ſaid "he went on "his way rejoicing," ſeems to have been a perſon, who, if not "an eunuch for the kingdom "of heaven's ſake," was at leaſt one who was ſeeking that kingdom with an earneſt and true ſolicitude. As ſuch an one he was diſtinguiſhed by the notice of that Being, "who hath made "of one blood all nations to dwell on the face "of the earth," and who is the tender father of all them that ſeek after the knowledge of his truth.

The ſtory is thus briefly told:—

"And behold a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch "of great authority under Candace, queen of "the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all "her treaſure, and had come to Jeruſalem "for to worſhip, was returning, and ſitting in "his chariot read Eſaias the prophet."

Such an employment of his time was a remarkable proof, that, notwithſtanding the high office he ſuſtained in the ſplendour of an Eaſtern court, he was laudably mindful of a greater good,

good, and a more exalted dignity, than human power or eminence could beſtow upon him. He was, doubtleſs, ſtrongly perſuaded that the grand buſineſs of his life, and that from which he was to derive ſolid happineſs, was to "ſeek "firſt the kingdom of heaven, and the righte-"ouſneſs thereof."

He was ignorant of the ſublime import of that evangelical doctrine which he read; but like all thoſe who ponder the ſubject of religion, with an heart reverently affected towards their Maker, he was thereby prepared for new doctrines—for a new and more clear conception of the truths of revelation—for that wiſdom which is from above—and that myſterious mercy which ſurpaſſeth all natural underſtanding. "And the place of the ſcripture which he "read was this: He was led as a ſheep to the "ſlaughter, and like a lamb dumb before his "ſhearer, ſo opened he not his mouth: in his "humiliation, his judgment was taken away: "and who ſhall declare his generation? for his "life is taken from the earth."

This deſcription was ſo peculiar, and inapplicable to the ſtate of human nature, both as to its meekneſs and the ſubjection of its will, that it is no wonder the enquirer ſhould be at a loſs how, and to whom to apply it: deeply intereſted in the divinity of ſuch a character, he queried of the apoſtle, "of whom ſpeaketh "the prophet this; of himſelf, or of ſome "other man?" "Then Philip opened his "mouth, and began at the ſame ſcripture, and "preached unto him JESUS."

The doctrine of the power and offices of JESUS, like all other important doctrines, hath been variouſly conſidered, and diverſely believed in. And till men ſhall become more ſtudious about *feeling* the *power*, than maintaining ſpeculative ſyſtems, of religion and of chriſtianity; they will yet have but unavailing pretences to ſuperior knowledge, and ſuperior light. All nations ſeem to have had an intellectual power of diſtinction between virtue and vice; to have been furniſhed with the fundamental principles of a law of righteouſneſs; and to have been called upon to regard it, as that which can make them wiſe and happy

happy while they live, and comfort them when they die.

"Righteouſneſs," it is well ſaid, "exalteth "a nation, while ſin is a ſhame to any people;" yet thoſe who have learned ſpiritually to diſtinguiſh between things that differ, and have been brought to the unſpeakable benefits of the chriſtian life, are beyond a doubt convinced that all their experience of the good of mere righteouſneſs, and a general courſe of virtue, is but the outer-court knowledge, in compariſon of that which reſults from the real *preaching* and inward *reception* of JESUS.

The mere *name* of JESUS, even conſidered as the immaculate Saviour of the world, may be repeated by the profeſſing chriſtian, and the ſound of it may be conſidered as a pleaſant and ſacred ſolemnity. But to profit by the unparalleled ſcheme of ſalvation, influential by the *nature* of JESUS—the pure and benevolent nature of heaven, as manifeſted in the Son of GOD; to profit by a manifeſtation which was deſigned to reach, to reform, and aſſimilate the minds of men; giving them thereby, the new

nature of diſcipleſhip, and fitneſs for an heavenly union, in time and for eternity; this is the height of all happineſs, of which human beings are capable, and all dignity that the order of our intelligence can ſuſtain.

But to become the happy partakers of ſuch ſublime advantages; or, in other words, *to go on our way rejoicing*; we muſt firſt have well learned thoſe original truths, which are the unchangeable principles of religion, and which are emphatically called "the firſt principles of "the oracles of GOD;" we muſt have learned, and *ſo* learned them, as to confeſs with the whole ſtrength of our heart, that by nature we are ignorant of the grace of GOD, in the ſalvation by JESUS CHRIST: ignorant indeed, even of immortality itſelf—ignorant of the nature of heaven, and conſequently of our extreme unfitneſs to enter into it—ignorant of the poſſibility of thoſe advances in divine *preparation*, which we have now reaſon to believe may be attained in this life, through a faithful and progreſſive adherence to the doctrines of JESUS, the ſhepherd and biſhop of ſouls!

Revelation

Revelation aſſures us, that "eye hath not "ſeen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it "entered into the heart of man to conceive, "the good things which GOD hath in ſtore for "them that love him." Revelation aſſures us, experience may convince us, that thoſe "good "things" (not being the riches and emoluments which thoſe who hate GOD poſſeſs in common with "them that love him") are the promiſed inheritance of all good men, even in this world. They are not to be gathered and grovelled in, like the riches of the covetous and vain-glorious perſon; but they are the ſpiritual knowledge, the divine experience, of heavenly love, and comfort in the Holy Ghoſt; the glowings of a patient but lively hope, that is full of immortality and eternal life.

Such are the "good things," imparted to them, who, under every allotment in time, continue their love towards the ſource of all lovelineſs and excellence; and are imparted in the moſt ſweet and delectable manner, through the miniſtration of JESUS; that JESUS who declared to his diſciples, "Lo, I am with you "always, even unto the end of the world;"

but the whole of whoſe preſence with us, and redeeming influence in us, are to raiſe us to ſublimer and more glorious ſpheres!

With every addition of ſuch knowledge, and thoſe added feelings of real divinity, which the meek and ſuppliant mind only can receive, we may imbibe a divine animation for the journey of life, and *go on our way rejoicing!*

On the other hand we are *naturally* ſenſible of numerous feelings of unhappineſs; and that a ſtrong attachment to earthly objects is a ſource of continual diſappointment and diſquietude—dejection of mind—"mourning, la-"mentation, and woe."

While the animal ſpirits are in the vigour of youth—while beauty ſhall be flattered, or wealth ſhall be approached with obſequiouſneſs—the irreligious and voluptuous perſon may appear, to common obſervation, as paſſing along his way like one happy and "rejoicing:" and this external appearance of earthly happineſs may ſometimes long continue, inſomuch that the poor chriſtian pilgrim, who is treading along

along his more humble and ſerious journey, "through many tribulations," may be nearly ready to cry out, "What difference is there "between the happineſs of virtue, and the "*rejoicing* of vice, in this ſtate of being?"

Yet a little attentive obſervation, on the general plan of the divine wiſdom and providence, muſt convince ſuch a pilgrim, that the apparent "rejoicing" which he conſiders, is more uncertain and tranſient than even life itſelf: diſordered paſſions often lead to the miſery of diſordered bodies, and deranged intellects—to violence, imprudence in the extreme, and abſolute deſtruction of that only kind of good, which ſuch perſons have been accuſtomed to ſeek: and having loſt their only ſource of "rejoicing," or rather of jollity and wantonneſs, which was altogether a ſource of ſenſuality; they have no other to flee to, in order to ſatiate their depraved appetites: they have no remaining means of indulging a fallacious and miſerable comfort.

And even with reſpect to thoſe common occurrences, which are in the neceſſary order of the

the divine government—the ſeparation of near friends and relatives, and the final decay of bodily health, from age and infirmities—the viſitation of heaven, in theſe events, *generally* comes upon the careleſs and the gay, unprepared for, and almoſt unthought of. They feel, as to this world, a ſhock of mortification and diſappointment to their vanity and ambition; and with reſpect to a *future ſtate*, which they then muſt moſt ſeriouſly begin to *fear*, as well as *believe in*—all is gloom and uncertainty, horror and deſperation!

Such in the preſent time, and always eventually, is the lot of them who forget their allegiance to the author of their being, and live a life diametrically oppoſite to the meek, mortified, ſerious, and benevolent life, which is taught and ſanctified by the nature of the goſpel of JESUS!

It remains then, that we ſhould endeavour to acquire that ſtate of mind which can look without envy, though not without concern, on that kind of animal exiſtence, which we have juſt deſcribed: and with a wiſe and worthy ſolicitude,

licitude, endeavour to embrace all the helps which the goodneſs of heaven is affording us, towards the overcoming of the evil appertaining to our nature; which is to receive, in this the time of our greateſt want, on which ſo much depends, the diſpenſation of that JESUS, whom Philip preached to the gentile.

It remains therefore, that, at leaſt like him, we ſhould read, ponder the path of our goings, ſeek every opportunity of inward inquiry, information, and the acquiſition of knowledge, faith, and love; thoſe intellectual, and only riches of the real chriſtian; and thankfully receive them in whatever manner it ſhall pleaſe infinite wiſdom to ſend them. Theſe are the ancient and invariable means, which we are called to embrace for the purpoſe of obtaining a well-grounded and durable happineſs, through the pilgrimage of this world, and the bleſſed privilege to *go on our way* " *rejoicing!*"

Among the various peculiarities in the conſtitution and allotment of man, the affections of *joy* and *ſorrow* are remarkable. Among the other orders of animal beings, inhabitants of this

this earth, it is indeed true, that thoſe affections are in ſome degree found. The flocks and herds of the field—the ravenous beaſts of prey—and even the tribes of inſects, are all made ſuſceptible of the ſenſations of pleaſure, or joy; and alſo, apparently, of the oppoſite ſenſations of pain or ſorrow. Theſe ſeem to be the effect of the conſtitution of their nature, as ſentient beings: and theſe effects may be conſidered as making parts of the vaſt variety, beauty, and wonder, of a merciful creation.

But while theſe ſeem to be acted upon by a peculiar inſtinct in their different natures, it is the diſtinguiſhing privilege of *man* alone to be capable of thoſe ſenſations, from moral and virtuous *reflection*; which, taking cognizance of various operations around him, leads up to conſiderations of the Supreme Being himſelf, the contemplation of his attributes, and of his infinite perfections. Man alone, in this lower world, is the creature apparently made capable of acknowledging the *will* of his Creator concerning him, and thence deriving ſenſations of joy and ſorrow, of the moſt humiliating and exalted kind.

The

The whole tenour of Holy Scripture goes to a clear and ſolemn proof, that thoſe ſenſations of joy, which exalt man above the nature of the beaſts that periſh, and produce in his mind a laſting happineſs, are only derived from an obedient reception of the law of his Maker upon him, and a reverent attention to the revelation of the divine will.

And on the other hand, thoſe ſenſations of *ſorrow*, peculiar to the exquiſite conſtitution of man's nature, are moſtly reſolvable into a diſregard to the revelation of that will and diſobedience thereunto.

Sorrows, indeed, there are, connected with the frailty of the human frame, and in ſome degree inſeparable from the viciſſitudes of things. But this merely conſtitutional cauſe of inferior ſorrow, may be ſaid to bear no compariſon with thoſe high privileges of joy and happineſs, which, under the influence of the divine goodneſs, man is called and formed to inherit.

So far as he may be conſidered as a paſſionate, and even a reaſonable being, he is a weak,

and

and (compared with ſuperior intelligences) a dark creature. But, conſtituted as he is, for an improvement, and an enlargement of his capacities; and to be made the gradual recipient of the divine wiſdom, and the all-perfect love of his Maker; he has an ordained privilege of emerging from mental obſcurity, and the effects of organical weakneſs, into the light and liberty of a ſuperior ſtate, and the enjoyment of an eternal union with the ſons of GOD.

A diſtinction ſo peculiar in itſelf, and ſo glorious in its tendency, ſhould make us ever ſolicitous, above all other things, in this world, for the knowledge of the *means*, as well as the *end*, which infinite wiſdom hath appointed.

The man that is thus far ſeriouſly convinced (and a ſerious conviction is often wrought in the minds of *all* reaſonable men) can have, ſurely, no *want of motive*, to deſire that increaſe of wiſdom, and right diſpoſition, which places us in a teachable, and leads us to a joyful ſtate of mind!

It is the deſire of improvement, flowing out of a conſciouſneſs of our ignorance, that fits us for the communications of new knowledge, and new animation of the celeſtial kind, to *go on our way rejoicing!*

There is no cauſe of rejoicing ſo worthy of man—none ſo ſweet, and ſo fruitful in its effects, as a conſciouſneſs of having received any new lights of divinity, and freſh and encouraging impreſſions of the ſolemn ſubject of ſalvation, and acceptance at the laſt day! Such a conſciouſneſs, operating as a ray from the ſun of the celeſtial firmament, imparts joy and gladneſs to an immortal ſpirit, and brings it to an inward expanſion in that joy of the ſalvation of GOD, which is "unſpeakable and full "of glory!"

This effect of the earneſtneſs of the heart's deſire after good, is a *ſure*, *infallible* influence, and benefit of the goſpel of that JESUS, whom Philip preached on the remarkable occaſion of which we now treat.

We

We may ſay further, that as it is repreſented to us as a purchaſed benefit and joy, reſulting from the original and moſt merciful principles of ſalvation by JESUS CHRIST; ſo it is the *ſure ordained* birthright, and eternal inheritance, of every reaſonable being, who barters it not away for ſenſual gratifications.

Various are the modes deviſed and adopted, among profeſſing chriſtians, of approaching to a ſuppoſed participation of that goſpel of JESUS; but we may ſet it down as a certain truth, that every mind, which, through ſtrong and fervent deſire, partakes of ability to reſiſt evil, and cleave in affection to that which is good, receives the aſſiſtance, and the only means and ſubſtance of ſalvation—receives the benignant notice and approbation of heaven—the inward power of "rejoicing."

But various and progreſſive are the privileges of the goſpel of JESUS, and moſt ſacred the call upon mankind, who are profeſſing chriſtianity, to attend to them, that they may not only know the LORD JESUS to be in them the meſſenger of a new-created love—the teacher of general

general and particular righteouſneſs—and the author of new encouragements in the hope of another life; but alſo that they may know him, by his powerful influence upon, and refinement of, their ſpirits, to be "the Lamb of "GOD, which taketh away the ſins of the "world:" not only to know, that by virtue of his ſacrifice, he fulfilled the law of atonement for ſinners, and procured the free conditions of pardon for all men; but that he is the holy high-prieſt, after an inviſible and unchangeable order—a perpetual inſtructor of our minds, and refiner of our hearts—bringing into the meek and lamb-like nature of himſelf, our affections and deſires; which perhaps were heretofore toſſed as with the tempeſt of natural paſſions, and not comforted.

The mind which has a knowledge of JESUS, in that meekneſs and humiliation in which he perfected the outward work of redemption, can alone know how to receive him, and rejoice in him, in his glorious offices of Author of our Redemption from all iniquity, and continual Advocate with the Father.

Such

Such believers may have no abſolute need of the *outward* preaching of JESUS, having themſelves entered with him "into that which is "within the vail," and been made partakers of the power of his reſurrection, into a divine element.

In their frequent humiliation with JESUS, whoſe kingdom is not of this world, all their worldly ſufficiency, and all the devices of *their own judgment, are taken away*; for in their ſpiritual crucifixion for ſin, their very life becomes as it were taken away from this earth, and *none of the children of this world ſhall record their generation*; becauſe it is a generation, or formation of a new life, which the children of this world cannot comprehend. But thoſe, who, through obedience, come to the experience of it, have a ſource of knowledge, ſtrength, and alacrity, for the remainder of their journey: having paſſed their ſolemn ſpiritual initiation into the church and family of JESUS, of which the outward baptiſm of the eunuch may be conſidered as a figure; having received the efficacious baptiſm of that Holy Ghoſt and Fire, which purifies and changes the heart, they will have come to a purification and redemption

of their affections; they can then feel, as all the inhabitants of the earth are called to feel, the animating influence of the divine truth itſelf; then are ſuch qualified to receive the goſpel experience,—the joy of the ſalvation of JESUS CHRIST,—to maintain a ſweet communion with him who is the miniſter of all joy from heaven. Thus, through the remainder of their journey in time, they are privileged, by holding faſt their faith and love, to partake alſo of an heavenly alacrity, and GO ON THEIR WAY REJOICING!

XIV.

In all labour there is profit; but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury. Prov. xiv. 23.

IN ſuch a mixed ſtate of good and evil as that wherein we are placed in this world, *profitable*, beyond compariſon, is the ſerious conſideration of thoſe maxims, which have a direct tendency to ſtore our minds with divine doctrine, and help us through every difficulty.

Numerous, weighty, and important, are thoſe truths, richly ſcattered through the moſt

divine of all volumes, from which theſe quotations are made. To read, conſider, and fully weigh them in our minds, were an employment for all the leiſure we can acquire, for all the moments we could poſſibly redeem from the hurry and evil that are in the world.

To attempt all we can in ſuch an employment, is worthy of every human being who would be wiſe and happy. But the multitude, ever prone to deviate from its own great intereſt, ever prone to err from the plaineſt path of rectitude, and the only path of peace, is more buſied in accumulating evil, and dwelling on viſionary good, than in taking that good which is within its reach; or exerciſing a capacity of turning imaginary bitters into real ſweets. The application of ſuch a privilege is nevertheleſs incumbent on human beings. And to call the attention of the inattentive to their errors, and their one common happineſs, is the worthieſt employment of a benevolent man.

Solomon found his mental account in ſuch an employment of his latter days; and if the warmeſt plaudits of the moſt wiſe and virtuous have

have any thing in them of ſolid fame, and the moſt laſting honour, the reward hath been continued from age to age, with the aſſurance of an eternal recompence.

Monuments of marble, ſilver, and gold, may be erected to heroes and politicians, and may be ſo many helps to the blandiſhments of lettered eloquence, and falſe declamation; but thoſe golden monuments of refined wiſdom, which have any ſolid virtue in them, are to be found under the different deſcriptions of heavenly truths, and the reflected tranquility and peace of the ſoul. Theſe are monuments which not only ſtand unſullied, but breathe and glow with perpetual luſtre.

Under this conſideration indeed, there are no remains of recorded wiſdom, which may bear a compariſon with the ſacred infallible dictates of the Holy JESUS. His was the ſupreme prerogative, to ſpeak the counſels of heaven, without imperfection, and giving them in all the ſanctity of the will of his heavenly Father.

Ever to be reverenced on earth, and through all the regions of angelick beings, are his tranſcendent and immaculate laws; but in this infirm ſtate of being, every way-mark to virtue, every maxim of wiſdom and happineſs, which are the fruit of a devoted and attentive mind, and which is recorded for admonition and encouragement, may be happily conſidered and ſet forth to view.

The value of ſuch declarations as this now before us, ſhould augment in our eſteem, in proportion as we may thankfully adore that goodneſs of the Creator, which made a human mind the receptacle of his own ſacred truth, and the mirrour by which he not only hath reflected, but is diſpoſed to reflect, ſome part of that beauty of holineſs, which was from the womb of the morning.

To bring the main point of doctrine, inculcated in the words above quoted, into profitable uſe, we are ever to conſider ourſelves as ſituated for a few—and but for a few—moments, in a ſtate of neceſſary *labour*, and a mixed and ſhadowy felicity.

This

This is not the world for which we were created. We are placed here in the ordering of indiſputable power, and from the unmingled motive of unerring goodneſs: capacitated to be made comparatively happy, and to be in the bleſſed path of advancement, through the things that may be ſeen and felt, to the ultimate perfection of happineſs, in the things that are not ſeen, eternal, and eternally glorious in another life!

This privilege, great beyond the poſſibility of preſent conception, is to have its beginning, and its progreſs, amidſt the "labour" of this world. The fabled Elyſium of idolatrous nations, into whoſe wiſdom and policy entered the labours beneath the ſun, of *idolatrous worſhip* towards "the gods," and works of revenge and cruelty towards men, was but miſerably conceived of, and miſerably founded, in the feelings, employments, and hopes, of mankind.

But we have better, far better principles, to inculcate, and apply ourſelves to the knowledge of; principles which even Solomon, in all his glory, hath but faintly, though inſtructively,

illuſtrated, by the degree of inſpiration by which he ſpake! But ſhall we fall ſhort of a portion of that divine conviction which illuminated his mind? Shall we fall ſhort of a practical uſe of that truth which diſtinguiſhed him from the kings of the earth, and gave him his place among the ſtudents of divine maxims? The ſo falling ſhort, would be to degrade ourſelves in the view of angels, who are waiting to receive us as their companions in heaven, from that world of labour which we are ſo ſoon to quit.

In all lawful labour there is undoubtedly profit. Let us conſider the obvious ſenſes in which profit may reſult from our appointed labour. For in the ſerious conviction of the mind there is preſent good, and every preſent is connected with a future, more enlarged good; as all the continued running of the ſtream of time is connected with the ocean of eternity, into which it flows.

Every individual being hath his province and his ſtation, which only the all-diſcerning eye of the Almighty ſees, and completely knows. Our ſtations differ, and our duties differ, in kind

kind and degree; and in all the variety of circumſtances, no two beings of our race are, or are to be, placed exactly alike. But to no human or created being is there an appointed ſtate of *inactivity*, or relative *reſt*.

The firſt and moſt obvious ſenſe, in which there may be ſaid to be profit in labour, is from the cultivation of the earth on which we live. It ſeems to have been the opinion of ſome religious men, that in the original ſtate of created nature, and in the firſt order of paradiſe, before tranſgreſſion had degraded the mind of man, there was no need of labour among the fruits of the earth; and this opinion ſeems to have been founded on theſe terms of the ſentence which the Almighty pronounced upon that tranſgreſſion: "Curſed is the ground for "thy ſake. In ſorrow ſhalt thou eat of it all "the days of thy life. Thorns alſo, and "thiſtles, ſhall it bring forth to thee."

But increaſed as the neceſſity of labour may have been, by this ſentence of the Creator, yet have we no ſolid ground of concluſion that the neceſſity of labour was excluded in the original order

order of providence; but rather the contrary, for ſeveral reaſons; as,

Firſt; Man, before tranſgreſſion, being in a ſtate both of bodily and mental activity, might then, as well as now, have been benefited by a portion of employment, for the preſervation of life, both in himſelf and other creatures. So that the poetical deſcription of the earth's bringing forth ſpontaneouſly every thing beautiful and fit for the gratification of man, and withholding every thing of an oppoſite nature, ſeems to have been fondly taken up without due reflection on man's original nature, powers, and relationſhip to his Maker.

Secondly; It is not clear that in his firſt ſtate he was not capable of much activity for ſuch a purpoſe, without the ſenſation of that wearineſs, which now renders labour irkſome. On the contrary, ſuch a fitneſs for unwearied labour ſeems highly probable, *i. e.* that the effects of the judgment on his tranſgreſſion were equally felt, in diminiſhing the vigour of his body, and the happineſs of his mind; and perhaps in the ſame propertion may we alſo conclude,

conclude, that the growth of noxious and unfriendly plants, implied by the "thorns and "thiſtles," on the face of the earth, may be increaſed alſo. But,

Thirdly; The point of the original deſign of ſome degree of labour, ſeems to be ſet beyond a doubt, by the declaration, [*Gen.* ii. 15.] reſpecting the allotment of man before his tranſgreſſion: "And the Lord GOD took the "man, and placed him eaſtward in Eden, to "dreſs it and to keep it."

Thus far it may be uſeful for our conſiderations of the origin of labour to extend, in order that we may acquire the fulleſt conviction of the divine purpoſe of the inſtitution; and finding it among the original benefits of "paradiſe loſt," we may cheerfully conclude, that it is one of thoſe employments of our diminiſhed abilities, which, in the mercy of GOD, may have a tendency to bring us the more ſafely on our way through this life, to the greateſt poſſible happineſs of it; and, in conjunction with all the righteouſneſs which is of faith, reſtore us back to paradiſe again.

So

So far as this ſhall be found the remote tendency of labour, we may happily remember that "in all labour there is profit." But as beings of the preſent day, we are greatly intereſted in the immediate effects of labour, as produced on the human mind; and perhaps it may be ſaid, with reference to the active faculty of that mind, that there is nothing more conducive than labour, whether in natural or artificial works, to the preſervation of men from evil thoughts, the ſallies of paſſion, or the calamities of dejection and deſpondency; all which are but too well known to be the frequent attendants on human nature, in a ſtate of indolence, to need any deſcription here.

Thus it ſeems to have been, that the eminently gifted apoſtles, though made apoſtles for the firſt preaching of that religion which it concerned all nations to know, and which in the idolatrous ſtate of thoſe nations they might have employed all their time in teaching; and though they may reaſonably be ſaid to have had a claim, on the believers, for a ſufficient bodily ſupport, yet were they perſuaded of the propriety of ſetting an example of bodily labour,

bour, working frequently in their occupations as tent-makers, &c.

Much of our happineſs, in the preſent ſtate of the world, may then be ſaid to depend, on our fully acquieſcing, from doctrine and example, in the fitneſs and good of labour, as a means appointed from heaven; and ſo appointed by a Being who cannot appoint any thing to man, but for his preſent and future profit.

The appointment is ſaid to be, and undoubtedly is, in itſelf, divine: the profit, or *degree* of good, reſulting from it, may be various, according to our views, and the predominance of our deſires, with regard to the end.

The man who propoſes to himſelf, as the chief good of life, the accumulation of riches and grandeur, and engages in labour with the view of acquiring them in order to be happy, miſtakes the beſt advantage of bodily employment; and though he may ſucceed in his views of acquiring property and diſtinction, he muſt fail in the grand point, which every wiſe man propoſes to himſelf: he may add to his cares

and

and incumbrances, but never to his rational and refined happineſs.

Man is formed for a *preparation* to enjoy a future, and more excellent ſtate of exiſtence; and that ſtate is often very excellently deſcribed, by way of diſtinction from the cares of this, as a ſtate of *reſt*. The good, in the hour of diſſolution, "*reſt* from their labours, and their "works follow them." Their mere bodily labour cannot be ſaid ſo to follow them; but the conſequence—the profit, of the *worthineſs* of their works, of whatſoever kind they have been engaged in, may; and we have moſt encouraging promiſes of divine revelation, that it ſhall be ſo.

It is then a part of the greateſt wiſdom of man, with reſpect to his labour in this world, while he patiently and reſignedly engages in the general neceſſity of it, to be employed in ſuch a kind and degree of induſtry, as the order of divine providence ſeems to him moſt ſimply to direct, for a frugal and peaceable ſubſiſtence; and that more with a view to the *ultimate* "profit" of his accountable nature, than the

preſent

preſent gratification of his paſſions, whether more or leſs ſenſual.

"In all labour there is profit," in ſome preſent and perſonal, or remote and relative ſenſe: there is a natural reſulting effect; but it remains for future obſervation to determine, whether thoſe moſt immediately engaged in the ardour of avocation, or others leſs concerned in it, ſhall reap that profit, even with reſpect to the enjoyment of the preſent ſcene of things; for the man that heapeth up riches, knoweth not who ſhall enjoy them, whether a wiſe man or a fool. And while one man, by painful and intemperate exertions, voluntarily incumbers himſelf with much more than may be neceſſary for his own ſubſiſtence, and that of thoſe who are dependant upon him, he often takes from others the means, or deprives them of the opportunity, of doing as much as may properly belong to their ſhare, as members of the community in which they live: thus, though "profit" reſults upon the whole of things, the worldly-minded chief labourer frequently miſſes of that ſimple portion of it, in which

which the harmony and enjoyment of his own mind, upon a principled plan of moderation, might have been eaſily ſecured; and the neceſſarily leſs-laborious, becauſe obſtructed, and ſometimes oppreſſed, man, pines in ſecret for want of that labour from which profit, in a worthy ſenſe of it, might ariſe to him.

It is not to be conſidered as in the power of one man, or even of any claſs or ſociety of men, to reform the human race; or reduce into harmonious order, the intemperance and diſorderly ſtriving of an erroneous and inordinate world. But we are *individually* anſwerable for ourſelves, reſpecting our conduct and deſires, under all the circumſtances in which we ſo variouſly ſtand; and while it is impoſſible for us preciſely to aſcertain, either the good or evil effects of our conduct on ſociety, however obſcure our ſtation is; ſo it becomes us, indeed it is incumbent upon us, to endeavour ſo to regulate ourſelves, and all our purſuits, as that we may ſet no evil example, of worldly-minded labour and anxiety on the one hand, nor blameable inactivity on the other. For while no man

man can be right in purſuing the cultivation of the earth, or the gain of commerce, to the diſtreſs of others who might harmoniouſly ſhare them with him, to greater general comfort; ſo no man can be warranted in ſeeking a ſubſiſtence in indolence, from the painful and diſproportionate labours of his fellow-beings around him.

Rules more particular may not be eaſily laid down; but the humble ſtudy of the mind, for the attainment of this part of righteouſneſs, cannot fail to be regarded of that omnipreſent Being, by whom a good man's ways are ordered in all things. And while ſuch a ſtudent will receive much inſtruction, comfort, and aſſurance, in the ſilent ſolicitude of his mind, he will aſſuredly be provided for, and made ſubſtantially rich in himſelf; while he ſees that the indolence and ſuperficial babbling, of the careleſs and negligent perſon, ſignified by "the "talking of the lips, tendeth only to penury," both as to the circumſtances of the body and the mind.

XV. The

XV.

The following reflections were thrown together with a design to alleviate the grief of one of the author's friends, then under affliction for the loss of a near relative.

Although affliction cometh not forth of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground, yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward. I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause. Job v. 6, 7, 8.

IN the present state of trial wherein we are placed, and subjected as we are to numerous calamities, however wisely those calamities are appointed to answer various purposes of present refinement and ultimate happiness, we have the fullest reason to conclude, that those offices are most acceptable to the Supreme Being, by which we can contribute to the comfort of one another.

Under this persuasion it is, that I most readily undertake the friendly task assigned me, by one whose happiness I am so much concerned for, and

and whoſe conſolation under every difficulty I wiſh to promote.

The words pointed out to me, and prefixed to theſe pages, I perceive, are a part of the expoſtulation of Eliphaz to Job, reſpecting his complaint, under his accumulated afflictions. The conferences which are repreſented as taking place between that pious but diſtreſſed man, and his friends, are among the moſt intereſting parts of Holy Writ; for notwithſtanding the ſpeakers are employed in a warm oppoſition of ſentiment to one another, they ſeem to be uniformly actuated by a love of truth, and a zeal for the honour of GOD: and though Job, in the bitterneſs of his ſoul, complains of his friends, as miſerable comforters, yet are many of the truths, which they advance againſt him, of the moſt eſſential nature in religion; and delivered in a ſolemn ſtrain of piety, which only the overwhelming meaſure of his woes diſqualified him from at firſt aſſenting to.

In the foregoing paſſage, the ſpeaker claims our particular regard, for the original depth of the divinity of his doctrine, *i. e.* as teaching us

to take for truth—the wiſe, inſcrutable, ſuper-intending providence, of the Almighty; than which, as there is nothing more ſtrongly declared throughout the teſtimony of Sacred Writ, ſo there is no other foundation on which to build, with ſecurity, any hopes of receiving a balance for thoſe preſent evils, to which our nature is incident.

The great doctrine, therefore, of the original myſterious wiſdom, by which all things were made, and the continual operation of a wiſe and myſterious providence, is fundamentally to be admitted into the deepeſt ground of the heart; and to be thought upon with a reverence ſuited to our weakneſs, and the awful majeſty of that Being who is equal to all the poſſibilities of things!

If once we loſe ſight of this, we loſe our intellectual hold; and like a ſhip which having loſt her anchorage, in a wide and tempeſtuous ocean, we are liable to be driven amongſt the troubled waves; to be toſſed by the adverſe winds, and tempeſts of human paſſions; and, as the prophet has moſt ſignificantly added,

"not

"not comforted;" there being no power on earth, or agency throughout univerſal nature, that can be to us a reaſonable cauſe of ſatisfaction or hope, if we are ſo unhappy as to miſs of that ſatisfaction, and that hope, which flow out of a reverent belief of the ſecret operation, and eternal ſuperintendance, of the Creator and Governor of the world.

On the contrary, ſuch a belief, which the Holy Scriptures abundantly call us to, and all viſible nature excites us to adopt, may be to us the moſt reaſonable and ſure ſource of tranquility and holy hope, in this world; and for the yet more intereſting world to come.

That afflictions do not ſpring out of the duſt, *i. e.* do not happen to us from mere accident, or a concurrence of events, in which the eternal order of the Supreme Being hath no part, would be a poſition laid down in the greateſt preſumption, without either a ſerious conſideration of his infinite wiſdom, power, and omnipreſence; or our own weakneſs, and the abſolute impotency of all finite beings and ſecondary cauſes.

As to his wiſdom, power, and omnipreſence, we are ſure that though they muſt glorioufly exiſt, and adequate effects muſt be the reſult of thoſe attributes; yet, finite, blind, and ignorant as we are—ignorant of the manner in which we exiſt from one moment to another, and even of the ſecret power of motion, or perception; by which we move one member of our bodies, or perceive one object ſubſiſting in our mind—we muſt neceſſarily be altogether ignorant of the laws of government and providence, as exiſting for ever in the divine mind.

We cannot, in the firſt place, underſtand the neceſſary cauſe for which the world, in any way whatever, was made to exiſt at all; yet, doubtleſs, there was an adequate and orderly cauſe of that exiſtence. And as nothing can exiſt without the energy of the one eternal cauſe, ſo the moſt minute circumſtances of the exiſtence of the ſmalleſt *inſect* which ever had life, muſt be the reſult of the neceſſary order of a hidden, myſterious, but eternal cauſe; or in another word, muſt be the *providence* of the Supreme Being—that Being in whoſe infinite eſtimation nothing that is, is either *ſmall* or *great*, or in any

any poſſible degree *wonderful*, becauſe connected with the *whole of things*.

Theſe obvious truths admitted, it will follow as a neceſſary conſequence, that in the great Creator's government of *us*, and the circumſtances appertaining to a life of mutability, by which we are to paſs through this ſtate of weakneſs into another ſtate of being, there muſt be numerous occurrences in our affairs, which we cannot poſſibly underſtand, or perceive the conſiſtency of.

The death, by which we die and paſs out of this world, is a neceſſary weakneſs—a neceſſary diſorder of the elements of which we are compoſed—diſorder at leaſt with regard to *our feelings*, for were no ſuch diſorder, no ſuch diſſolution of the elements to take place, we muſt be unchangeable in the frame of our nature, and, in the preſent mode of our being, eternal; which is utterly incompatible with the idea of a created and dependant ſtate.

It is therefore equally certain, that thoſe occurrences which happen to us by the change

of relationſhip, and circumſtances around us, being changes, in the ſtate of bodies, incident to the infirmity of their nature; and alſo thoſe changes of the painful kind, of which we are often ſenſible in our own frames, and which altogether we are frequently wont to call affliction, *come not forth of the duſt*, in the ſenſe before mentioned; but are the effects of the ſecret operations of the one only moving cauſe, and original of all things.

Yet, "man is born unto trouble, as the "ſparks fly upward." As the ſparks fly upward, by a neceſſity in the laws of natural bodies, when brought into a ſtate of diſſolution or change, by means of the diſſolving element of fire; even ſo by the operation of animal fire, or the fire of the ſoul, by which the activity of all ſentient beings is carried on; or by the operation of that univerſal pervading principle of motion, by which all change in mere material bodies is effected; by which even the moiſture of the earth is exhaled, for the formation of the clouds of heaven, and made to deſcend in gentle ſhowers or torrents of rain; by which the winds of heaven move and agitate the

the face of nature; by which the fruits of the earth bloom and wither; by which all that is high and lifted up becomes humbled and brought low; man, the ſentient, reflecting, and therefore *ſuffering* creature, is neceſſarily affected and troubled by the progreſs and effects of theſe and numberleſs other operations.

This trouble is the natural conſequence of his being born into ſenſible and reflecting exiſtence, therefore it is, that he "is born unto "trouble, as the ſparks fly upward." Man is, indeed, born with a mind capable of much pleaſure and delight, and placed in circumſtances largely adapted for enjoyment; but then the very circumſtances of his being ſo capable, and ſo placed, imply the neceſſity which there is, in the order of things, for him to be capable alſo of certain degrees of pain. Man is neceſſarily liable to painful ſenſations, from *natural* and *moral* cauſes. He is liable to pain from *moral* cauſes, becauſe among the vaſt variety of human beings, who come into the world in this mixed probationary ſtate, it may fairly be preſumed, that there are no two individuals conſtituted exactly alike, either as to capacity for

for knowledge, or perception; hence it must be that no two minds can be in *perfect* unison with each other; and that difference of constitution must necessarily, in a state of intercourse, produce the "trouble" of *disagreement*, (in the language of our text) "as the sparks "fly upward." And this truth is founded in the moral necessity of man's having a liability to pain, that he may, by way of contrast, have a taste also of its opposite, which is pleasure; for pleasure uncontrasted with pain, would be no longer pleasure; as any degree of suffering, uncontrasted with pleasure, would be no longer pain, because without the measure of estimation by any comparison.

Man, as a social creature, is liable to pain from *natural* causes, because he is naturally liable *to die*, and so break that connexion with his species and things around him, which gave him pleasure in the social degree in which he enjoyed it. Thus also, he "is born unto trouble, "as the sparks fly upward." Man is also born liable to "trouble;" because, as the offspring of a degenerated nature, a nature contaminated by the guilt and consequence of original disobedience,

bedience, he is prone unto *evil*, which is an invariable ſource of "trouble."

"There is no peace, ſaith my GOD, to the "wicked." This is an unchangeable poſition of Holy Writ, founded in the unchangeable righteouſneſs of GOD himſelf. It is his own neceſſary and awful prerogative, to know what degree of wickedneſs it is, in his creatures, that can admit of no alleviations of peace or comfort, in the doctrines of his own mercy, in time or in eternity. It is man's duty to be ever jealous of himſelf, leſt he be found ſo obnoxious to the divine puniſhment, as to be beyond the ſacred limitations of that peace: at leaſt always to fear that his duties are too ſuperficially and inſincerely performed. Thus it was that the primitive chriſtians, in their ſtate of ſuperior godlineſs, were injoined to have their obedience "coupled with fear." Now fear, though a neceſſary part of a life of obedience and godlineſs, as it implies uneaſineſs and painful ſolicitude of mind, is a neceſſary "trouble," to which even the beſt of mankind are born. So true is it, that in every ſtate of this frail and accountable

accountable exiſtence, "man is born unto "trouble, as certainly as the ſparks fly upward."

But is there no remedy, no righteous and merciful counterbalance, for all theſe neceſſary ſources of *affliction* and *trouble?* This, now, becomes an intereſting and awful queſtion; but before we anſwer it, we will propoſe another: Doth not the very doctrine by which we eſtabliſh the neceſſity of affliction and trouble in this ſtate of being, alſo hold out to us the glorious exiſtence of an infinitely merciful, juſt, and powerful, GOD? A being, whoſe attribute of love, in which all things are ordered for the beſt, hath been co-eternal with his own exiſtence, and muſt endure for ever, for "GOD is "love." And GOD, though inconceivably exalted above all comprehenſion; in virtue of the attributes of his love and omnipreſence, is acceſſible to all, even the loweſt and moſt afflicted of his dependant creatures. Wiſe, then, and only wiſe, was that reſolution with which our text concludes, and whereby we may be moſt happily inſtructed: "I would ſeek "unto GOD, and unto GOD would I commit "my cauſe."

Now

Now of all the reſolutions which beings, ſuch as we are, can take up, none can be more ſuitable to the humiliating imperfection of our faculties, and our various weakneſſes and propenſities to evil, than *ſeeking* unto GOD, and *committing* all our cauſe to Him. And to this we are moſt benignantly and tenderly excited by the addreſs of Himſelf, unto us, as a ſtanding perſuaſive to our acceptance of the one only conſolation under all degrees of trouble: "I "love them that love me; and they that ſeek "me early ſhall find me."

In theſe gracious words we are not only inſtructed to underſtand wherein our great happineſs and conſolation lie; but are plainly inſtructed in the eaſy, ſimple means of ſecuring to ourſelves the greateſt of all benefits: that is to ſay, by cultivating a love of our Father which is in heaven. His undefiled and unmixed love, is the eſſential authority and dominion, by which he reigns in heaven, and among the only happy inhabitants of the earth. And to cultivate in ourſelves a love of him, is to ſeek and obtain a ſanctuary in his kingdom

dom of love, and to ſecure the bleſſed privileges annexed to our reaſonable nature.

This was alſo the import of that doctrine which our Bleſſed SAVIOUR inculcated among men, as a continuation of the original and everlaſting goſpel. "Seek ye firſt the kingdom "(or love) of GOD, and his righteouſneſs, and "all other things ſhall be added unto you." Of all the objects of a reaſonable and righteous love, the Supreme Being himſelf, the fountain of all mercy and all love, is infinitely the moſt worthy, becauſe to him we owe the privilege of our exiſtence, and all thoſe circumſtances which can make our life deſirable, in time and in all eternity.

And though in this world we muſt neceſſarily be engaged in inferior attachments, and the offices of ſocial ſervice and kindneſs; yet is it to be remembered, that we love nothing earthly as we ought to love it, unleſs we have reſpect therein, to the obligation of our ſuperior love and ſubmiſſion to the Supreme Being; who, in virtue of his glorious attributes, muſt neceſſarily, in the carrying on of his perfect government,

government, and for the perfecting of the greateſt good to us, deprive us of, or take us away from, every attachment and every object, that is ſhort of himſelf.

Hence it is that the doctrines for the right diſcharge of our ſocial duties, move, in the goſpel, upon the ground of a *general* and *diffuſive* regard and benevolence; not falling ſhort in kindneſs to all claſſes of men, on the one hand; nor exceeding the bounds of real righteouſneſs, into any inordinate attachment, dependance, or refined idolatry, on the other.

Thus it is that we are to do good to them that hate us, deſpitefully uſe us, or even perſecute us: and thus it is, that whoſoever loveth the neareſt, and moſt cloſely connected relative, beyond a conſiſtency with the true and ſupreme affection towards GOD, and a perfect reſignation to his will, is not worthy of the ultimate ſalvation of JESUS CHRIST.

The relationſhip of huſband and wife, parent and child, or intimately connected friends, are certainly tender; and where a natural ſimilarity

of

of mind happens to be an additional circumſtance, the diſſolution of the attachment becomes the harder for human nature to bear. Where, alſo, ſuperior ſtrength, or ability for exertion, is looked to as a ſource of protection, in either of theſe relationſhips, the natural ſeparation which *muſt* enſue, may involve the poor ſurvivor in much fear and apprehenſion, as well as in the ſofter lamentations of ſentiment and wounded affection.

But all this is inconſiſtent with that *ſeeking unto* GOD, in a ſupreme love of him, and that committing our cauſe unto him, which is our reaſonable ſervice and moſt eſſential duty: for there is nothing, not wholly ſinful, in our ſocial attachments, but what he is the cauſe of; nothing, not wholly ideal, in the ſecurity of human aſſociation, but what he is the author of. And therefore our mourning, and ſometimes inward cultivation of grief and alarm, on account of whatever He, who is the eternal giver, is pleaſed to deprive us of, is unſuitable to that ſupreme love of, that reſignation to, and dependance upon, Him, and the perpetual miniſtration of his ſon JESUS CHRIST; which make

make us the loving children of our Father which is in heaven, and give us the true diſtinction of real chriſtians.

To this ſhould be added, as a moſt important conſideration, tending happily to fix our acquieſcence in all troubles, incident to the infirmity of our minds: "Shall not the judge of "all the earth do right?" Can preſumptuous man ſuppoſe for a moment, that whatever falls out in the courſe of the univerſal government of the world, happens at an improper ſeaſon? It muſt neceſſarily be, that the end of *all things* muſt come; and in an order, too, ſuitable to the perfect, though unrevealed laws of that government, which ſubſiſteth through univerſal nature.

And as GOD, the all-perfect governor, is in himſelf exalted above all poſſibility of receiving a good to himſelf, or any increaſe of his perfect happineſs, from any effects of his own ſupremacy, it muſt neceſſarily follow, that all the good of his univerſal government is deſigned to centre in his creatures, the ſubjects of his

his government; and more eminently ſo in his intelligent creature man.

The *how*, the *when*, and the *wherein*, which too often exerciſe the inquiſitive powers of ſpeculative and preſumptuous men, are points demanding in us a reverent ſilence, ſuitable to our poſitive incapacity for ſuch kinds of knowledge.

But it muſt neceſſarily be, that the inconceivably glorious Creator muſt be a governor, in whom are united the infinitude of power, wiſdom, and goodneſs. And theſe truths admitted, it muſt neceſſarily follow, that no event, under the controul of his power, can happen, but for the beſt upon the whole; in a manner alſo, and in the preciſe order and ſeaſon of time, in which its due and harmonious ſubſerviency to the perfection of the whole, could only take place.

Where then is the cauſe of *murmuring*, *lamentation*, and *woe*, on account of the occurrence of any thing in this world, however deemed by inconſiderate men, as afflictive, or habitually complained

complained of under the head of *trouble*, as though they came diſorderly forth of the duſt, and ſprang wildly and undirected out of the ground?

The ſerioufneſs of theſe conſiderations, reſpecting the neceſſary uncertainty of all human poſſeſſions, and perhaps wrongly-eſtimated pleaſures, ſhould lead us into an earneſt and increaſing ſolicitude, after a nearer acquaintance, in every ſtation of human life, with the only right, ſupreme love, which hath the GOD of love and of all glory for its object.

Under ſuch a happy bent of our affections, we may not only hope to be preſerved from the defilements of groſs errors and iniquity; but while we cultivate the general good-will, which is the fruit of the love of GOD, the merciful and equal governor of the world, we may be happily kept from over-rating and diſtinguiſhing any, even of the moſt refined earthly pleaſures, which are no more valuable to us, in fitting us for heaven, than the moſt painful occurrences and ſufferings.

What then remains for us to do, with the whole bent of our heart's affections, but to love him above all—being, as we are, ſo mercifully aſſured, that thoſe who thus love Him, He, in a moſt benignant, divine, and diſtinguiſhing ſenſe, will love; and thoſe who thus ſeek Him early, or in preference to all other beloveds, ſhall find Him? Shall find Him near them, and in them—the ſource of all bleſſedneſs, and the theme of living delight, and of everlaſting praiſes?

Neither are we only encouraged thus to ſeek Him for ourſelves, and commit the cauſe of our own protection and ſalvation to Him; but alſo the protection of all our righteous affairs, and the moſt tender concerns of our children: theſe are the ſure objects of his fatherly care, and providential bleſſing; for he hath not only ſaid, "Let thy widows truſt me;" but, "leave thy "fatherleſs children, I will keep them alive:" and again, "I ſhew mercy unto thouſands (all "the generations) of them that love me, and "keep my commandments."

To

To conclude; all the ſure protection that flows from infinite power and goodneſs—all the happineſs of which our immortal nature is capable, under the bleſſed influence of the grace and ſalvation of JESUS CHRIST, in time and in all eternity, is to be relied upon by thoſe who love GOD above all; and who in all their *weakneſs*, *afflictions*, and *trouble*, *ſeek unto* GOD, *and unto* GOD *commit their cauſe!* The grace, therefore, of the Lord JESUS CHRIST, the love of GOD, and the communion of the Holy Ghoſt, be with them for ever. *Amen.*

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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